



# **EUROPE AND THE CZECHS**

**by S. GRANT DUFF**

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# **EUROPE AND THE CZECHS**

**by**  
**S. GRANT DUFF**

**with nine maps by**  
**MARTHE RAJCHMAN**



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To

**NOEMI RIPKA AND HUBERT RIPKA**



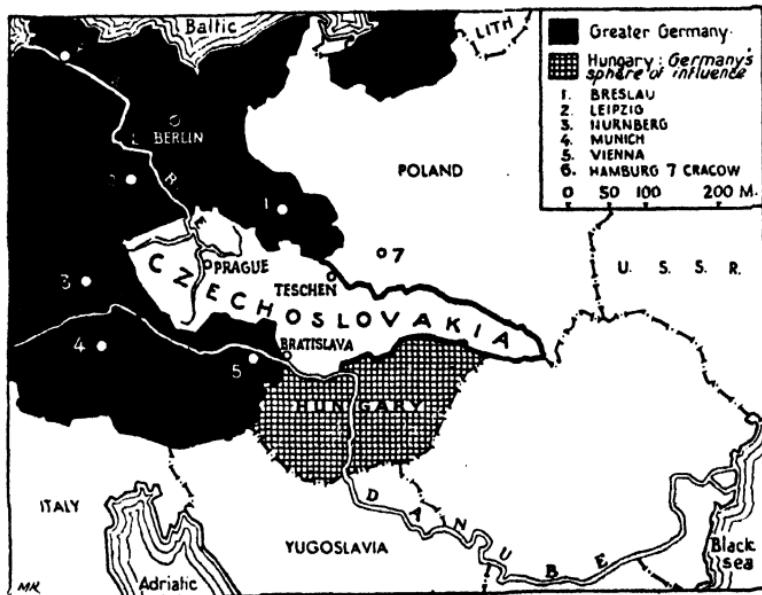
*The Greeks at Thermopylae, when the Persians came near the pass, being alarmed, consulted about a retreat. While they were deliberating on these matters, Xerxes sent a scout on horseback, to see how many they were, and what they were doing. When the horseman rode up to the camp, he reconnoitred, and saw indeed not the whole camp, for it was not possible that they should be seen who were posted within the wall, which, having rebuilt, they were now guarding : but he had a clear view of all those on the outside whose arms were piled in front of the wall. At this time the Lacedaemonians happened to be posted outside ; and some of the men he saw performing gymnastic exercises, and others combing their hair. On beholding this he was astonished, and ascertained their number ; and having informed himself accurately, he rode back at his leisure, for no one pursued him, and he met with general contempt. On his return he gave an account to Xerxes of all he had seen. When Xerxes heard this, he could not comprehend the truth, that the Grecians were preparing to be slain and to slay to the utmost of their power. But, as they appeared to behave in so ridiculous a manner, he sent for Demaratus, son of Ariston, who was then in the camp ; and when he was come into his presence, Xerxes questioned him as to each particular, wishing to understand what the Lacedaemonians were doing. Demaratus said, ‘These men have come to fight with us for the pass and are now preparing themselves to fight. For such is their custom, when they are going to hazard their lives, then they dress their heads. But be assured, if you conquer these men and those that remain in Sparta, there is no other nation in the world that will dare to raise their hands against you, O King ! For you are now to engage with the noblest Kingdom and city of all amongst the Greeks and with the most valiant of men.’*

HERODOTUS.



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I. THE GERMAN THREAT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA



■ Mountains above 2000 feet forming natural frontier between  
GERMANY & CZECHOSLOVAKIA

■ other mountains " "

## 2. CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S NATURAL DEFENCES

equivocal than any used since August 4th, 1914, that Germany would find Great Britain ranged against her. Italy, as before, was committed to the support of Germany; Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, all neighbours of Germany, could not have remained neutral. Between a warring Europe and a warring Far East, the United States might not long have remained at peace.

The very extent of the threatened war proved that it was not a war for a handful of Germans, not a war for the sake of the Czechs. Issues are at stake that concern a far greater area than those districts for whose possession Czechs and Germans prepared to fight. If another free and powerful democracy—Czechoslovakia—is destroyed by fascist militarism, the cause of liberty will not be merely on the defensive throughout more than half the world. It will be in retreat. For Czechoslovakia occupies a key-position in Europe, and the formation of its German frontier is that of a natural fortress. While this position is held, a limit is put to the Nazi programme of aggression. If it falls, others besides the Czechs will lose their freedom.

While the Czechoslovak frontier is held, even an aggressive Nazi Germany will hesitate to advance Eastwards. Already Germany's frontier with Poland and, since the annexation of Austria, with Hungary lie several hundred miles east of her frontier with Czechoslovakia. Without the risk of a Czechoslovak counter-attack in the rear, Germany cannot attack either Poland or Hungary. If the Nazis have aggressive intentions in Eastern Europe, they must first annex the Western districts of Czechoslovakia from which Germany can be attacked. If they did this, it would serve a double purpose. It would straighten the Eastern frontier between Berlin and Vienna (see Map 1), and would rid Germany of her most formidable opponent in Central Europe. The German eastern bases, immune from western attack, would have nothing to fear from the East.

The German frontier with Czechoslovakia is the only natural frontier which confines Germany in the East (See Map 2). Together with the Pyrenees, which divide France from Spain, with the Alps which divides Italy from Germany, the Sudeten mountains form one of the few natural frontiers which Europe contains. This frontier has remained practically unchanged for hundreds of years. To-day it is the only strategic line which could block a German eastward advance. Therefore the military defence of Eastern Europe must concentrate behind it. If Germany can straighten her Eastern frontier so as to include these mountains, no significant opposition will meet her until she fights Great Britain and Russia for the oil-wells of Rumania. Once Czechoslovakia falls, that day will not be far off.

Important as Czechoslovakia is as a military line of defence in Europe, she is still more important in holding the European balance between East and West. Thanks to the invention of flying, distances have shrunk and key points of defence have changed. Czechoslovakia occupies to-day the position which the channel ports have occupied in the past. The safety of Great Britain demanded that these should not be controlled by a Great Power hostile to Britain. This was the source of England's perennial quarrels with France. In 1914 it was the threat to the Channel Ports which finally decided Great Britain to enter the war against Germany. During the war, the development of new methods of warfare revolutionised the strategy of defence. To-day the command of the Channel Ports would be certainly less dangerous to Europe as a whole and hardly more dangerous to Great Britain, than an aggressive Germany dominating Czechoslovakia.

The balance of power has always been the vital concern of Great Britain. An aggressive Germany can no longer be held in check by a purely western combination. Neither Eastern nor Western Europe could defend itself alone against aggression. Each is vital to the

security of the other. Czechoslovakia is the bridge which connects Eastern and Western Europe. She is allied with France and she is allied with Russia. Militarily this means that if Nazi Germany attacks in the East she will risk being attacked herself in the West. She will be faced with war on two fronts. This, in Hitler's view, was the fatal mistake of Germany's pre-war policy. He criticises pre-war German diplomacy for having simultaneously alienated Great Britain, France and Russia. On May 21st he found himself in the old position, with the dangerous addition of an independent Czechoslovakia occupying the most important districts held by the Kaiser's ally, Austria-Hungary. The "interests" of Germany and those of Europe as a whole were seen to conflict as diametrically in May, 1938, as they did in August, 1914.

On May 21st, a new policy was forced upon Hitler. Either he had to adapt the interests of Germany to those of Europe as a whole; or he had to avoid the use of force as a means of obtaining his ends, until his force was stronger. In these new circumstances, and failing his willingness to consider the first alternative, the only policy for Hitler to pursue was to entice the British Government into handing over Czechoslovakia to Germany either by the offer of compensation or in other ways—such as a Four-Power Pact between the two Dictatorships and the two Western Democratic Powers. If Hitler could accomplish this diplomatic triumph, he would have reversed the results of the 1914-1918 war. Central Europe would lie at Germany's feet as it lay at the feet of the Central Powers in 1917. If Hitler's Germany could establish, before war actually broke out, the position which the Kaiser's Germany won, after three years fighting, in 1917, Hitler could present Great Britain and France with the choice of accepting German terms or fighting in circumstances far more unfavourable than those of May 21st, 1938, or August, 1914.

It is a sign of the times that international politics are again based almost entirely on military calculations. This is the spirit which Hitler and Mussolini have brought back to Europe. "Mankind grew great in eternal conflict," wrote Hitler in his notorious book, "in eternal peace it perishes."

This is the spirit which Hitler revealed to Czechoslovakia last May and it is the existence of this spirit which is forcing the whole world, for better or for worse, into dependence for their own future on the fate of Central Europe. If Germany were non-Nazi and peaceful, and did not believe in war as an instrument of policy, it would not be necessary for the British and French to consider, above all, how Germany's capacity to wage war would be affected by any settlements of disputes between Germany and her neighbours. Even if Nazi Germany were satiable there would be a case for satisfying her at the risk of adding to her military strength. Her leaders reiterate, however, that the subjection of Czechoslovakia is by no means the sum of her demands. The return of her colonies, Memel, the Polish Corridor, Eupen Malmédy, Lichtenstein . . . to name but a few . . . have all, at one time and another, been the main preoccupation of the officially-inspired German press. Herr Hitler himself has exhaustively and publicly declared Nazi aims. In a short space of time he has achieved a considerable number of these aims. There is no reason to believe that he would renounce the next if his capacity to achieve them increased.

The aggressive character of the Nazi régime, its denial of the liberal traditions and values for which Great Britain stands, and its insatiability, are all reasons why Britain must reinforce Czech resistance to Nazi aggression.

The ostensible cause of the dispute between Germany and Czechoslovakia is the presence within Czechoslovakia of a German-speaking minority—the Sudeten

Germans. The Sudeten Germans are not Germans in the sense of having once formed part of Germany, but only in the sense of being "German-speaking." They originally came to the districts in which they now live several centuries ago, as immigrants and colonists, just as in modern times hundreds and thousands of Germans have emigrated to Brazil. The Sudeten Germans settled down in one state with the Czechs, with whom they have lived ever since. In spite of its voluntary character, the association between Czech and German has been a stormy one, periods of co-operation alternating with periods of open conflict; and their present discontents are by no means new, although the form they take is in keeping with the times.

There are three and a quarter million Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia who live for the most part near the German frontier. There are eight main districts which are almost entirely Sudeten in character. These districts do not form a continuous whole and there are large numbers of Czechs interspersed with Sudeten Germans. More than 80 per cent of the Sudeten Germans are to-day followers of Konrad Henlein, who formed his party (the *Sudeten Deutsche Partei*) in 1933, after the dissolution of the Sudeten German Nazi Party. Henlein vigorously repudiated the suggestion that he was either Nazi or in touch with the German Nazi leaders. Five years later, in April, 1938, he announced to his followers that they belonged, after all, to a Nazi Party. They received this announcement with the same enthusiasm with which they had received earlier announcements to the contrary. Henlein's British friends were less gratified by this patent admission that Henlein's words were not to be trusted, and that the story he told in this country was different to that he told to his followers. It had long been apparent from their words and actions inside Czechoslovakia that the Henlein leaders were preparing the Sudeten Germans for the Nazism which they had formerly so assiduously rejected. At the last elections

before its dissolution (1929) the Sudeten German Nazi Party obtained less than 13 per cent of the votes. The *democratic* Henlein in the following elections (1935) obtained 67 per cent. In the communal elections of May, 1938, the *Nazi* Henlein gained over 80 per cent of the purely German votes. In spite of pressure amounting to terrorism there are still Sudeten Germans, led by Wenzel Jaksch, who dare to vote Social Democratic; others vote Communist. At the present time, to be a socialist in the Sudeten German districts is an act of heroism on the losing side. The vote is necessarily small. If fortunes were reversed, and Socialism, rather than Nazism, was again on the up-grade in Europe as a whole; if the Nazi terror was removed, it would not be long before the 80 per cent Nazi majority dwindled to a fraction.

The Sudeten Germans are the most submissive of all Germans, and are slightly despised in Germany. They are easily controlled. After the war they were 100 per cent anti-Czech (*negativist*). In 1929 they were nearly 80 per cent pro-Czech (*activist*). Now they are again 80 per cent anti-Czech. This is because Nazi Germany, and not Czechoslovakia, calls the tune. The Sudeten German problem has been brought by Nazi Germany into the field of international relations. Germany has deliberately taken from Czechoslovakia the power to deal satisfactorily with her own internal problems. But up to 1936, not even Nazi Germany interfered in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia. To-day the German Government does so for reasons of foreign policy. It justifies its intervention on the ground that all those who speak German, whether they live in Czechoslovakia, Switzerland or Brazil, belong to the "German nation." All who belong to the German Nations are under the direct protection of the Third Reich. Since the German "Nation" lives scattered in every corner of the earth, the Third Reich extends its authority far beyond its frontiers. To-day, wherever

there are Germans there are Nazis, and instruments are being formed for Germany's use all over the world.

Nazi Germany, as we have seen, wishes to control Czechoslovakia for the strategic and political reasons. The Sudeten Germans are the instruments at hand. If the Sudeten Germans can get into such a position inside the State that they can control its policy, Nazi Germany has accomplished its aim.

The Henlein Party (SdP) demand, among other things, territorial autonomy and a change in Czechoslovak foreign policy. Territorial autonomy means that the frontier defences fall into Henlein's hands. If Czechoslovakia cannot defend herself, she must obviously pursue a policy agreeable to the Nazis.

Czechoslovakia is the arsenal of Central Europe. The capacity of her war industries is three times the size of those of Italy. It is therefore the obvious interest of the Nazis to see that these guns are used for Germany rather than against her. Accession to Henlein's demands means, therefore, not only the submission of Czech independence to Germany, not only the sacrifice of a few more hundred thousand German democrats to the brutality of the Nazis; it means the reorientation of Czechoslovakia away from a policy of peace. It means a few more million guns on the side of the Rome-Berlin axis and the anti-Comintern pact; guns for Japan in China; guns for Italy in Spain; guns for Germany against Western Europe.

Germans in Czechoslovakia have all the political, personal and intellectual rights of a civilised democracy, which the Nazi leaders have taken from the Germans in Germany. The Sudeten Germans have the same rights as the Czechs. They vote freely and by secret ballot, they have their own political parties, their own members of Parliament, their own schools, universities, theatres, libraries. They may form and maintain their own trade unions (banned in Germany), and may confess what religious faith they please without, as in Germany,

fear of imprisonment and persecution. They enjoy equality before the law in a democratic judicial system. In addition to all this the Nationality Statute now under discussion would give them a large measure of autonomy —that is a commanding voice in purely Sudeten German affairs, with their own officials, their own local police.

It would not be out of place to compare the Nazi treatment of the only minorities which live in the Third Reich. Socialists, Communists, Liberals and Pacifists have been exterminated. Protestant and Catholic priests are in gaol. The treatment of the racial minority is an object-lesson of political and moral retrogression. The Jews in pre-Hitler Germany, like the Sudeten Germans in pre-war Austria, were a *Staatsvolk*. Hitler relegated the Jews to the position of a minority in the same way that the Sudeten Germans were relegated to the position by the Minorities Treaties. But the Sudeten Germans, even as a minority, never lost their political, social, economic and intellectual rights. To-day they again have the position of a *Staatsvolk* and special autonomous rights in addition. Compare the case of the Jews.

The following is a statement issued on July 29th, 1938, by the Council of the Federation of Jewish Organisations in Germany:

The gravest problems confront us. In a situation which has scarcely seen its like in the troubled history of our people, we have tried, not without success, to keep at bay the threatening shadow of chaos.

The scope of our existence becomes ever narrower. The exclusion from professions and business throws the majority of the Jews in Germany into permanent unemployment. Our strength threatens to fail.

This is not only true of German Jews. Thousands of German Aryans have had to leave their homes and are wandering abroad without the means of subsistence; thousands are persecuted for their religion; are held in

prison without trial; mutilated in concentration camps and have lost their lives. The murderers of Dollfuss are publicly honoured. Hitler's early comrades were shot down by his hired assassins. Every honest man knows that it is miserable hypocrisy for Nazis to talk of the "oppression" of Sudeten Germans.

"We want to live as free men among free men," said Henlein. This is what the Austrian Nazi leaders said, and those who are not in prison have shown what Nazi freedom means.

Czechoslovakia is the last free country East of the Rhine, and the numerous Sudeten German Democrats who stand by the Czechoslovak Government in its life struggle with the Nazis are the last organised Germans in Europe who stand for peace and freedom.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY HISTORY OF THE CZECHS

CZECHS and Slovaks, united in a struggle for national liberation, overthrew at the end of the War the feudal Empire of Austria-Hungary and created modern Czechoslovakia. The historic state of Bohemia had arisen again after 400 years. In 1520, Bohemia became part of the Hapsburg possessions. In 1918, it severed its connection, and the last of the Hapsburgs departed from the throne of Austria.

Through the small territory of modern Czechoslovakia run historic arteries of European trade. South-east through Bratislava, the Slovak capital, the Danube flows to the Black Sea. North-west, through Prague, runs the Moldau, joining the Elbe some fifteen miles away and flowing through Germany to the port of Hamburg and the North Sea. Czechoslovakia is threaded on the waterways which connect the easternmost and westernmost sea-coasts of the continent. This territory, lying on the cross-roads of the Continent, has been coveted from time immemorial.

Very early in the history of Europe a sturdy Slav race came from the east and settled in the plain sheltered behind the arc-shaped fringes of the Sudeten mountains between Germany and Czechoslovakia—one of the few natural frontiers of Europe. Some of these Slavs penetrated beyond the mountain ranges and overran what is to-day Prussia. It is for this reason that the North Germans have a strong admixture of Slav blood in their veins and that there are living to-day in northern Germany compact minorities of purely Slav race. These are the Wends. The Slavs penetrated Germany

and the Germans, in their turn, penetrated the purely Slav territory of Bohemia. This penetration was often peaceful and the Germans came as settlers. For the most part they remained in the mountain districts which were rich in mineral deposits. In the Middle Ages Bohemia became part of the Holy Roman Empire and the most famous of Bohemian kings, Charles IV, was also Holy Roman Emperor. The Bohemian kings encouraged the German colonists, not only because they were capable craftsmen and added to the wealth of the Kingdom, but also as a counterweight to the ambitions of the mediaeval aristocracy. They were given special privileges which, not unnaturally, excited discord between them and the Czechs, and encouraged them to colonise Bohemia in considerable numbers, and to possess themselves of many offices in Church and State.

In this way, the natural frontier between Bohemia and Prussia ceased to be the language frontier between German and Czech. Czech and German settled down side by side in Bohemia; the Czechs in the interior, the Germans on the frontier.

Long before the dawn of modern nationalism that frontier was troubled. Strategically vital in every contest, the Sudetenland and its people became the scene and the instruments of continuous struggle. These mountainous districts command the plain below, guard the western gateway to the Danube Valley, and stand as a barrier between Germany and the prospect of an Eastern Empire.

During the last ten centuries, the Slavs have been slowly pushed eastwards by the Germans. This German drive to the East started with the coming of Christianity. Bishoprics were founded to Christianise and Germanise the Slavs. Marches were created on the eastern borders of the German provinces, and with the sword and the Bible and their able hands, the Germans started to penetrate Eastern Europe and to found the colonies

which to-day are dotted across that part of the world like stepping-stones.

Of all the Slav races, the most determined and the most indomitable were the Czechs. To this day Czechoslovakia remains as a small Slav promontory in a German sea. The Czechs have clung stubbornly to their language and their national character. Their modern boast that they can hold back the renewed German pressure of our own day appears justified by these centuries of experience. In the light of this interminable German thrust Eastwards, Henlein's recent demand that the Czechs cease to regard themselves as a bulwark appears as naïve as it does silly. The Czechs are again holding their own, as they have been forced to do over and over again throughout the last ten centuries: to-day, as in the past, national independence stands for a wider conception of freedom than the mere absence of German domination.

Masaryk, first President and indeed founder of the Czechoslovak Republic, saw the meaning of Czech history "as much in the nation's fight for freedom of conscience as in the struggle for national existence against the mighty pressure of Germanism." In the most heroic periods of Czech history, freedom of conscience for the Czechs has also meant freedom from the Germans. So is it to-day. The Czechs are resisting not only German coercion but the crushing and destructive philosophy of Nazism. So was it five centuries ago when freedom of conscience to the followers of John Huss meant freedom from the corrupt German Bishops, freedom from the German princes sent by the Pope to crush the rebellious Hussites.

Some historians have seen the principal cause of the Hussite movement in the struggle between Czech and German. The wealthier and most powerful positions in the Church were held by Germans, the lower and poorer offices by Czechs. In preaching against the abuses of the Church and the corruption of the higher

clergy, the Czech reformers were also preaching against the Germans. It was much the same in the University of Prague, from which the Czechs felt themselves being slowly ousted by the Germans. Therefore the movement for reform was necessarily at the expense of the Germans, since it was they who possessed all the most lucrative offices in Church, State and University. The tremendous influence which John Huss exercised derived from the fact that he represented both the religious and national tendencies of his time.

John Huss, religious reformer, Czech patriot and greatest of Czech democrats, preached in the native language in the University of Prague and in the Bethlehem Chapel. Great crowds came to hear him from all the surrounding districts and his movement soon became a strong popular movement against privilege and corruption. The German clergy were not unnaturally alarmed by this demonstration against their position, and they called on the Pope to condemn Huss as a heretic. Huss was known to hold many of the views of John Wycliffe, and the German clergy represented that he was corrupting the faith rather than reforming the morals of the Roman Catholic Church. Huss indignantly denied the charge of heresy, and maintained to the end that he was innocent of any breach of doctrine.

The Pope hesitated to condemn him. Huss had powerful supporters and the protection of Wenceslas, King of Bohemia. But he also had powerful enemies, not only among the German Bishops but in Sigismund, King of Hungary, brother of King Wenceslas. The increasing number and simple character of the great majority of his supporters began to alarm the German nobles as well as the German clergy. The Hussite movement assumed a revolutionary character and Huss preached violently against the sale of indulgences in Prague. Three young men who tried to interfere with the Papal agents who were selling the indulgences were

seized and publicly put to death. The students of Prague demonstrated in the streets and carried the dead boys to the Bethlehem Chapel for burial. The Pope excommunicated Huss and ordered the destruction of the Chapel. The followers of Huss beat off the Germans who tried to carry out the Papal orders.

The determination of the Czechs to defend their convictions if need be by force was more than evident. In spite of the danger of a Czech revolt which contemporaries foresaw, Huss was lured to Constance and, notwithstanding the safe conduct which King Sigismund had given him, was burnt at the stake as a heretic in 1415. The influence of John Huss in his life was nothing to this influence after a martyr's death. The Czechs were incensed, and the whole country declared its adherence to the Hussite cause. At first King Wenceslas was sympathetic, but he grew alarmed by the strength of the popular movement inside his country, by the threats of Emperor Sigismund, and the displeasure of the Pope, who threatened a crusade. "His position appeared to him a hopeless one should he have to encounter the whole force of Europe in a crusade, for not only did his rule extend over a comparatively limited territory, but it was further weakened by the German element in the towns, which always furthered foreign intervention."<sup>1</sup> The Germans have apparently changed little through the ages. The same is true of the Czechs, and they prepared in the fifteenth century to resist a far more dangerous assault on their independence than that which the Nazis threaten to-day.

In the hour of need when the German princes were arming to carry out the crusade ordered by the Pope, when the Germans within the Czech frontiers were actively assisting the invader, the Czechs found a great military leader in the blind John Žižka, the greatest military genius of his time. Žižka had to create an army out of a rabble of peasants armed with clubs, sticks and

<sup>1</sup> *Bohemia* by Count Lützow.

axes, and he had to resist heavily-armed horsemen. By the weapon he chose Žižka anticipated tank-warfare. His great invention was the "wagon-fort"—simple agricultural carts chained together and protected by sheets of iron. These he used both for defence and for attack, and time upon time he routed the heavily-armed enemy.

The Crusades launched against the Czech Hussites failed completely, and the Czechs issued victorious from a fierce struggle with the armies of the greater part of Europe; German Princes, Danish Kings and even an English Cardinal (Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester) were "at last obliged to join in the general stampede."

The whole of Europe was much alarmed by the victories of the Czechs, and as the Czechs marched victorious through southern Germany, towns as far distant as Hamburg and Lüneberg hurried to build fortifications. But the Czechs returned home. "Had they, like their ancestors, desired glory," wrote a contemporary chronicler, "they would have marched as far as the Rhine, and have subdued many countries." Count Lützow, the historian of Bohemia adds, "By their victory at Domažlice, the Bohemians (Czechs) attained the summit of their military glory. At no time was the fate of Europe so completely in their hands as at that moment (August, 1431). The idea of opposing them in the field, which even before this crowning victory was scouted by many, became an absurdity. The Bohemians (Czechs) on the other hand still desired peace. It has, perhaps, not been sufficiently noted that they were entirely unaffected by the intoxication of victory. They made no attempt to assert their supremacy in Europe, which would not have been impossible for them at this moment. . . ."

Aggressive wars are not in the nature of the Czechs. The story is told of one battle during the Hussite wars on the eve of which the Czechs tried to make an agree-

ment with the enemy forces that whoever would win the battle would treat the other with compassion. The Germans, who were certain of winning, answered, "that they would let no heretic live." It so happened that the Czechs won. Typical of the Czechs is Count Lützow's story of Žižka's death. Žižka died of plague, and before his death urged his followers that 'they should firmly and faithfully defend God's law . . . and then brother Žižka commended his soul to God and died.' "This tranquil death," wrote Count Lützow, "would appear a fitting end for the great Bohemian patriot."

The real danger of which the German princes were afraid was not Czech domination but the influence of Hussite ideals. These were not only for greater religious purity and the reform of the secular scandals of the Church, but were becoming more and more democratic; the Hussites stood for greater social equality and political liberty. The Hussites themselves lived very simply, and the town of Tabor, which they built and made their stronghold, was organised on early Christian lines; no differences of rank were recognised between peasant, townsmen and nobles. These were dangerous ideas for feudal Germany, and the princes were alarmed by demonstrations of sympathy for the Czech Hussites on the part of their subjects. National differences between Slav and Teuton subsided before the championship of common ideals. A parallel was seen in May, 1938, when, in eight factories near the Czech-Austrian frontier, Austrian workers struck because they believed that war had broken out between Germany and Czechoslovakia and the Czechs were invading Austria and would liberate it from Nazi rule. For the Austrian workers as for the German serfs of the fifteenth century, the Czech armies brought liberation and not conquest.

Just as to-day the Czechs stand for democratic freedom while the Germans are coerced under a despotic system, so in the Middle Ages and up to the end of the

fifteenth century, the same difference was to be seen. Slaves and serfs were unknown in Slavonic countries; and the oldest Czech institutions were democratic. However, writes Count Lützow, "Through the constant contact with Germany, feudal institutions were slowly introduced into Bohemia, and the peasants gradually became more dependent on the nobles. Still, this was not so entirely the case as in Germany, and the armed peasants at whose head Žižka had defeated the armies of half Europe were still freemen."

At the end of the fifteenth century, the liberties of the Czechs were much curtailed, first by their own nobles, and then, in 1520, by the Hapsburg sovereign whom they chose for their King.

The Hapsburgs were rulers of Austria, and fervent Catholics, as well as more in sympathy with the Germans of Bohemia rather than with the Czechs. The intensive struggle between Catholic and Hussite, German and Czech, was renewed, and the Czechs were finally overpowered at the battle of the White Mountain, by Prague. The Austrian Hapsburgs and the Counter-reformation were victorious. Czechs were driven into exile or brutally killed. Bohemia lost over three-quarters of her Czech population. The Czech language was proscribed, the Czech Hussite Bible was burned and the faith and freedom of the Czechs everywhere trampled on and destroyed. The Czech nobility was practically exterminated and in its place came upstart Catholic nobles from Austria who confiscated the lands of the dead Czech aristocrats and imposed a German aristocracy over the democratic Czechs. No effort was spared to bring back the Czechs to the Roman Catholic faith. "Better a desert than a country full of heretics," said Ferdinand of Hapsburg, and the Bohemian province of the Hapsburg Empire became a desert for the mutilated Czech nation. For nearly three hundred years Czech independence was lost and its free institutions were crushed. To-day, after only twenty years of independence,—

independence which has been used to build afresh the free and democratic institutions of the country, the Czechs are threatened again. To-day it is the menace of the northern Germans, to whom the Austrians themselves have succumbed. The conflict is no longer between Roman Catholics and Hussite, between peasant and prince, but between those who believe in toleration in Church and State and those who believe in the totalitarian gospel of Hitlerism.

Between these two dates, three hundred years apart, lies a long period in which no significant Czech life stirred in the Bohemian provinces of the Austrian State, in which German was everywhere preferred to Czech; Czech subordinated to German. Till once more the embers of Czech independence glowed again under the influence of the greatest Czech leader since John Huss—Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, Masaryk, like Huss, was primarily a teacher, and, like Huss, he gave expression and form to a movement already in existence.

## CHAPTER III

### BEFORE THE WAR

BETWEEN the days of John Huss and Thomas Masaryk, the situation of the Czechs had changed disastrously. The one-time free and self-reliant nation which had turned imperiously back from the foreign conquests which awaited it, was now everywhere subordinated to the Germans it had then not deigned to conquer. Its freedom had been trampled on; its rights ignored.

Bohemia was no longer one of the foremost electorates of the Holy Roman Empire but had become a mere provincial appendage of the Hapsburg monarchy, and even those Czech rights which the early Hapsburgs had recognised, had long ceased to be observed. The Hapsburg Monarchy extended its rule far and wide over Austrians, Hungarians, Sudeten Germans, Italians and Rumanians; over seven different brands of the Slav race—Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenes in the north, over Croats, Slovenes and Serbs in the south (see Map 3). But over all this medley of races—this “negation of racialism” as it has been called—two nations ruled supreme—the Austrians (Germans) and the Hungarians. The absence of “racialism” meant the domination over all other races of these two peoples alone.

For the subject races it meant the stultification of their national life and the thwarting of their national aspirations.

To the primary interests of the Austrians and Hungarians, all other interests were subordinated. Theirs was the central system of government: the administration was in their hands; the schools were theirs, the riches of the country flowed into their pockets. The

Austro-Hungarian Empire was built on privilege—on national, social, economic and political discrimination. The Czechs, like the other Slav nations (with the exception of the privileged Poles), were treated as underlings, their language was regarded as the servants' language, their national susceptibilities were continuously insulted. This subordination of Czech to Austrian-German in all the walks of life encouraged a wide measure of solidarity among the Czechs; national unity was strengthened by the absence of class division. The Austrian Empire reaped the problem from the seed it had sown when it destroyed the upper and middle classes of the Czech nation in the Thirty Years War. The bourgeois and national revolution occurred simultaneously, and the demand for greater social and economic justice coincided with the demand for the restitution of national rights. This gave a double impetus to Czech national aspirations. It is because this impetus has not yet exhausted itself that the Czechs to-day are so united and indomitable. There is no conflict for them between their class and their national interests.

The Czech national revival of the early nineteenth century was primarily a literary and historical movement, but as the Czechs slowly rediscovered the greatness of their history, their pride in the past inevitably turned to discontent with the present. Though the Czech patriots were far from being revolutionary, to the bureaucrats of the Austrian reaction they appeared a dangerous element in the State. Their traditions were too democratic for the Austrian authorities to contemplate their revival without fear.

The Czech national revival coincided with the long periods of absolutism and reaction which marred the nineteenth century. Police spies, *agents provocateurs*, censorship and persecution dogged the footsteps of the Czech patriots. Even conservative Czech patriots like Palačky, the greatest of Czech historians, "incurred

the special hatred of the military rulers of Prague." Czech national consciousness awoke in a period of persecution. The cause of nationalism and the cause of freedom were bound up together. This undoubtedly strengthened the Czech national movement, made it more radical, and ultimately helped to direct it against the very existence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In the beginning, however, the Czech national party was not anti-Austrian. Count Lützow, in his history of Bohemia, points out that when Bismarck's Prussia attacked Austria in 1866, the Czechs alone were vigorous in the defence of Austria. The Viennese declared that the Prussians could be beaten off with a wet rag, the Hungarians sent a corps of volunteers to help the Prussians, the Sudeten Germans welcomed the enemy with open arms. The Czechs offered to fortify the passes of the Sudeten German mountains; the Austrian Government refused their offer and replied haughtily that it was a war of "Germans against Germans." There was a bitter saying in Austria, Count Lützow adds, "that those nationalities which support the Government suffer and those that oppose it prosper." So was it with the Czechs. Their demand that the ancient rights of Bohemia should be revived was passed over; it was the Hungarians who were advanced in 1867 to be co-rulers of the Hapsburg Empire.

Czech loyalty to Austria and the Austrians was more self-interest than actual love of the Austrian régime. The only alternative, they imagined, was that of the pan-Germans—the unification of the German States as suggested at the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848. The Czechs saw how dangerous this would be for their national existence, since Bohemia, after three centuries of subservience to Austria, was regarded as a German rather than a Czech State. "The point was not whether Bohemia would send to Frankfurt the 68 deputies allotted to her—the question was a bigger one," wrote Havliček, the greatest journalist of the

Czech revival. "Would it be a free kingdom in a free Austria, or a province lost within a Germanic Empire constructed on the ruins of the Hapsburg Empire?"

At that time, the Austrian Empire seemed to offer to the Czechs the only framework within which Bohemian independence could be restored, and more than one Imperial adviser actually favoured the Czechs and tried to restrain the anti-Czech activities of the Sudeten Germans and many of the Austrians; but they met with strong opposition. Hitler, for instance, himself an Austrian, writing in *Mein Kampf* of the last period before the war, very strongly criticises the policy of the Hapsburg dynasty as being pro-Slav and anti-German. In fact Hitler was entirely mistaken: the Emperor Francis Joseph was strongly anti-Czech in outlook. But Hitler heartily disliked anything for which Austria, at its best, might have stood. He hated the Slav elements. He hated Vienna, which he regarded as a "Babylon of races," and he feared that the German element in Austria was being slowly overwhelmed by the Slav. His fears, however, were based on complete ignorance of the real situation. It cannot be denied that in nearly all periods, the German element was invariably favoured in Bohemia at the expense of the Czech. The Sudeten Germans were used for the most part by the Viennese Government to maintain against the Czechs an autocratic régime, and to establish over them the supremacy of the German race.

Absolutism and the racial arrogance of the Germans convinced the Czechs in the dawn of their national revival, as it had done in the full spring-time of the Hussite period, that their fate as a nation was bound up with the cause of freedom as a whole, and that freedom first and foremost, meant freedom from the Germans.

In the nineteenth century the Czechs, therefore, were fighting on two fronts—against the Austrian imperial system and against the Germans. The struggle

against the Austrian system was not revolutionary until the outbreak of war. It was a struggle for federalism, for a restitution of the original independence of Bohemia under the early Hapsburgs. It became revolutionary only after it had been continuously thwarted chiefly by the opposition of the Sudeten Germans, and when the war made it clear that the increase of this influence in Austria-Hungary would be supreme if the Central Powers won the war. The wisest counsellors of the Hapsburgs were overruled by the fierce opposition of the Sudeten Germans.

If Bohemian independence—even provincial autonomy—were restored, the Sudeten Germans knew that they would again become what they had formerly been, a German minority in a Slav State. While Parliament was in Vienna and not in Prague, the Sudeten Germans could easily maintain their predominance over the Czechs. Under the Austrian gerrymandering system of Parliamentary election, though there were six and a half million Czechs and the Sudeten Germans were only half that number, the latter had 55 deputies and the former only 75. This meant that the Czechs were easily outnumbered in the Vienna Parliament, for they had only 109 deputies and the Austrians and Sudeten Germans together had 233. German supremacy was, therefore, neatly and constitutionally maintained.

The constitutional difficulty then, as now, was the lack of clear demarcation between Czech and German. The Germans opposed all solutions which would have increased the power of the Czechs in predominantly German areas, and demanded that those Czechs who lived there should de-nationalise themselves and become Germans. This German aim was furthered by the economic persecution which the followers of Henlein to-day reserve for those Germans who are not Nazis. In those days, Czech workmen, with no hope of protection, were thrown out of their jobs, expropriated from their cottages and generally persecuted, unless they

obeyed implicitly, in political and national questions, the commands of their German employers.

The story of the attempts to reach some sort of provincial autonomy on national lines in Bohemia is hardly encouraging to the present discussions in Czechoslovakia. Before the war all attempts failed, and this was as much due to the inherent difficulties of the situation as to the opposition of the Sudeten Germans. The position to-day is not so very different from what it was then. The Czechs have the Government in their hands. But they are again at the mercy of the Sudeten Germans who at the present time, as certain of German support as formerly they were of Austrian, can successfully repulse any scheme of constitutional reform which would cramp their efforts to dominate the Czechs.

In the days of the Austrian absolutism there should have been hope of some solidarity between the Czechs and the more liberal Germans, against whom absolutism was equally directed. The racial hatreds of the Sudeten Germans were, however, too strong. "The radicals' hatred of the slavic 'inferior' race," writes Count Lützow, "was as great as that with which they viewed all authority and orderly Government. An alliance with such men was impossible." German workmen threatened the life of Rieger, the Czech radical patriot, to such an extent in 1848 that he was forced to fly from Vienna; nor was this an isolated occurrence.

Periods of antagonism have always alternated with periods of co-operation between Germans and Czechs. In the early days of the Czech revival, German poets rivalled the Czechs in writing of the ancient glories of the Czech nation. Goethe himself was a member of the Czech Nationalist "Society of the Bohemian Museum." But the German sympathy expressed for the Czech national revival in its earliest days was swept away before the increasing economic competition between Germans and Czechs.

Largely owing to economic developments, the intensive industrialisation of the Sudeten German districts and the need for cheap, unskilled labour, the Czechs were making rapid advances. For economic reasons a Czech movement of population was taking place, and the Czechs were invading the German districts in response to the demand for labour, just as, centuries previously, Germans had crossed the Bohemian frontier from Germany in answer to the earlier demand for skilled labour.

The German middle and upper classes as well as German workers, felt their privileged position being slowly sapped and the Czechs coming again into their own. The positions of the Czechs in pre-Austria and of the Germans in modern Czechoslovakia are incomparable. The German bourgeois treated the Czechs as underlings, the Czech language "as fit for servants," and refused to learn Czech or treat the Czechs as equals. The German workers, who feared the Czechs equally, found racial grounds for their antagonism, and, like their modern counterparts across the border, put up notices saying:

*"Jews, Czechs, and dogs not admitted."*

The excesses and racial hatred of Nazism are native to Bohemia, as is the movement itself. Long before Adolf Hitler and his friends collected in the beer hall in Munich after the war, Nazism had become a flourishing concern among the Sudeten Germans. They learnt it from Schönerer and Wolf, the fathers of modern pan-Germanism. They were organised at first in the German Workers' Party which was formed in 1908, and in 1917 they even took the name which Hitler afterwards borrowed for his party—the German National Socialist Workers' Party. The founders of this party were Krebs and Jung, both of whom to-day—having fled from Czechoslovakia after the Czechs banned the Nazi Party in 1933—are deputies in the Berlin Reichstag.

Krebs has even been made a Gauleiter of an unknown district, and is said to be Hitler's chief and most sinister adviser on the Czech question.

Originally it was Hitler who learnt from the Sudeten Germans, and in the early days of his party he used to meet with the Sudeten German and Austrian Nazi leaders and common plans were drawn up. The Austrian party even before the war was frankly irredentist and always regretted Bismarck's failure to annex Bohemia after he defeated Austria at Königgrätz in 1866. Count Lützow tells how even in 1866 the Sudeten Germans "on several occasions welcomed the Prussians with so much enthusiasm that it was only the loyalty with which the King of Prussia, even in time of war, discouraged such manifestations that prevented their leading to serious consequences." Seventy years later, those consequences seem again uncomfortably near.

The Sudeten Germans were the real enemy of the Hapsburg State. They hated the Czechs, whom they saw to be the chief obstacle to German expansion. They hated the Hapsburg dynasty, which they suspected of helping the Czechs. They hated the "Austrian Idea" which was supernational and therefore opposed to German as to Czech nationalism. They welcomed the Austro-German alliance of 1879 as an instrument of German policy.

Hitler in *Mein Kampf* echoes all the criticisms which these early Sudeten German Nazis made of Austria-Hungary and of the Hapsburgs. He considered the Austro-German alliance to be an abuse of German protection.

Hitler was an Austrian, and was born and brought up in the Monarchy. He spent his early days in Vienna, which he hated. In his opinion the policy of the Hapsburg dynasty was anti-German and the German element in Austria was being steadily overwhelmed by the progress of the Slav nationalities. The only justification for an Austro-German alliance would have been the

strengthening of the German character of the Monarchy and this, indeed, was its only security. The German alliance was heartily disliked by all the non-German peoples of the Monarchy and Hitler believed that if the war had originated in a German instead of an Austrian quarrel that the Slavonic races would have risen in revolt and made it impossible for the Austrians to honour their engagements to Germany.

Foremost in their opposition to the German policy of the Austrian Government were the Czechs, and Hitler's fear of Slav sabotage of the Austro-German Alliance was shared by the German Ambassador in Vienna, who was seriously alarmed by the Russophil sympathies of the Czechs. There were two tendencies among the Czech political parties—the tendency to look towards Russia represented by Kramář, the first Prime Minister, and which stressed the Slav character of the Czechs, and the tendency represented by Masaryk, which looked to the Western democracies and which underlined the traditionally democratic character of the Czechs. After the signing of the Treaty between France and Russia in 1891, the Czech sympathies were whole-heartedly on the side of a policy friendly to this Dual Alliance, since it satisfied both the Western sympathies of the followers of Masaryk and the pan-Slav followers of Kramář.

This was the exact policy, however, to which the Austrian Government was so fervently opposed, and the outbreak of the war in 1914, following the murder of the Austrian Archduke by a Serb at Sarajevo was at once an indictment of the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary and of the system on which the Empire was built.

It was inevitable that the pan-Germanism of many of the ruling Austrians should have been countered by the pan-Slavism of the ruled.

The subject races of Austria-Hungary looked for support to the independent Slav nations beyond their frontiers. The Czechs to Russia, the Serbo-Croats to Serbia. It was the agitation of the Serbo-Croats

within her frontiers which made Austria so determined to destroy Serbia. But behind Serbia, behind the Slavonic races of the Empire, stood Russia, a constant menace not only to the foreign political designs of Austria but to the stability of her internal régime.

The Central European settlement was obviously insecure so long as Austria and Russia both claimed the souls of the Slavonic subjects of the Austrian Empire. Wiser counsels urged that some form of federal independence should be given to the Slavonic districts of the Empire so that rabid nationalism might exhaust itself in the routine of self-government. But Germans, Austrians and Hungarians alike were convinced of their own innate superiority over the Slavs and yet deadly afraid of pan-Slavism. The only alternative to their own domination of Central Europe was, they feared, its domination by Russia.

"If the Serbs continued," reads the German White Book of August 1st, 1914, "with the aid of Russia and France to menace the existence of Austria-Hungary, the gradual collapse of Austria and the gradual subjection of all the Slavs under one Russian sceptre would be the consequence, thus making untenable the existence of the Teutonic race in Central Europe. A morally weakened Austria under the pressure of Russian pan-Slavism would be no longer an ally on whom we could count and in whom we could have confidence, as we must be able to have, in view of the ever more menacing attitude of our Easterly and Westerly neighbours."

War had been brewing between Austria and Serbia for many years. Conrad von Hoetzendorf, the Austrian Chief of Staff, had advised war over and over again since 1908. In that year, the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina aroused a storm among the patriotic Serbs who saw added to their brothers already under Austrian rule another million Southern Slavs (Serbo-Croats). Germany, on the other hand, warmly

backed up the Austrian Government. In the crisis which ensued, the Kaiser stood, as he said later, "in shining armour, by Austria's side." The result was a resounding victory for the policy of Austria and Germany over that of Russia, supported by Great Britain and France. The Russian Foreign Minister, Isvolsky, had been shamelessly tricked by Aerenthal, the Austrian. But it did not ease in any way the internal situation of Austria-Hungary. It merely added another one million to the five million Southern Slavs already under Austrian or Hungarian rule, so that Slav agitation both within and without the Empire was inflamed.

"In Bohemia," wrote Count Lützow in 1909, "the measure was intensely unpopular. The people—rightly as events have proved—believed that the Empire would become yet more subservient to Germany. The annexation not having been received as patiently as Count Aerenthal believed, Austria had to rely on Germany, and with German help the annexation was safely carried out. It would be attributing to Germans more generosity than they claim were we to doubt that their influence in Austria will become yet greater. That influence is always used against Bohemia and in favour of the German minority of the population of that country. The policy of the present Austrian Prime Minister is more hostile to Bohemia than that of any of his predecessors. Dark clouds seem to surround the future of Bohemia."

Count Lützow ended his book on this prophetic note. Less than five years later war had broken out and the Czechs were martialled in a German cause to fight their fellow Slavs.

The German point of view was given in the German White Book issued on August 1st, 1914, quoted above.

"It was clear to Austria that it was not compatible with the dignity and the spirit of self-preservation of the monarchy to view idly any longer this (Serbian)

agitation across the border. The Imperial and Royal Government apprised Germany of this conception and asked for our opinion. With all our heart we were able to agree with our ally's estimate of the situation, and assure him that any action considered necessary to end the movement in Serbia directed against the conservation of the monarchy would meet with our approval.

"We were perfectly aware that a possibly war-like attitude of Austria-Hungary against Serbia might bring Russia upon the field, and that it might therefore involve us in a war, in accordance with our duties as allies. We could not, however, in these vital interests of Austria-Hungary which were at stake, advise our ally to take a yielding attitude not compatible with his dignity, nor deny him our assistance in these trying days. We could do this all the less as our own interests were menaced through continual Serb agitation. . . . We therefore permitted Austria a completely free hand in her actions towards Serbia, but have not participated in her preparations."

Germany's attitude to this conflict in Eastern Europe was determined to a large extent by her view that conflict in Western Europe was ultimately inevitable. In 1914 as in the 'sixties and in 1938 the problems of Eastern Europe, Central Europe and Western Europe were closely connected and no decision could be reached in any part which did not radically affect Europe as a whole. The French had not forgiven the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870. England was blocking the path to German ambition, both naval and imperial. Furthermore many people in Germany feared that if war broke out only between Germany and the Western Powers, Austria would not come to her assistance. It was therefore of vital necessity, if war had to break out, that Austria should be involved in it from the first. Finally, at the end of 1912 Ludendorff had written that Russia was "still very much behindhand with the

reorganisation, equipment and arming of her forces . . . but that she will be stronger with every year that passes." In February, 1914, Moltke, the Chief of Staff, recorded a decided increase in the Russian Army, and in June, he is reported to have said, in reference to Franco-Russian preparation, "We are ready, and the sooner the better for us."

The Czechs did not find the decision so easy. They were dragged into a German war for German ends and they were expected to fight fellow Slavs—Serbs on the southern frontier, Russians to the north. Their ancient rights ignored, a system of police spies, censorship and persecution clamped down upon them the moment the war broke out, they were given little encouragement to fight; for if the Central Powers lost the war, they would be involved in the ruin which those Powers had brought upon themselves. If the Central Powers won, the only outcome would be a strengthening of German Imperialism. Vienna and Budapest would become, to a yet more disastrous extent, the tools of pan-Germanism. Alike in defeat and in victory, freedom—even the limited freedom they possessed—would be lost.

Dark clouds indeed seemed to surround the future of Bohemia.

It was in this situation that Masaryk proved once and for all his powers as a leader of undaunted courage, singleness of purpose and purity of vision. All his life he had taught the Czechs that their cause was bound up with the cause of freedom, that democracy was the only political system worthy of the dignity of man.

The Czechs had three courses open to them.

The first was to co-operate loyally with the Central Powers in winning the war. The second was to press for a federal or autonomous system within the Empire. The third was to make every effort in their power to destroy the Empire and bring about its defeat in war. Till the last few months of the war, the majority of the Czech nation had no clear idea of the future which they

might either desire or expect. In the first week of the war, however, Masaryk had definitely decided against both of the first two courses. His reason for doing so was his conviction that Vienna and Budapest were really the tools of pan-Germanism, and that if the war was won by the Central Powers, its chief result would be an enormous increase in pan-German influence. "Viewed in historical perspective," he writes in his *Making of a State*, "pan-German imperialism seemed to be a continuation of the age-long antagonism between Rome and Greece, West and East, Europe and Asia, and, later, between Rome and Byzance, an antagonism not merely between races, but also between civilisations.

"In virtue of our whole history, our place was on the side of the Allies. Therefore, after analysing the European situation and estimating the probable course of the war, I decided to oppose Austria actively in the expectation that the Allies would win and that our espousal of their cause would bring us freedom."

## CHAPTER IV

### WAR AND PEACE

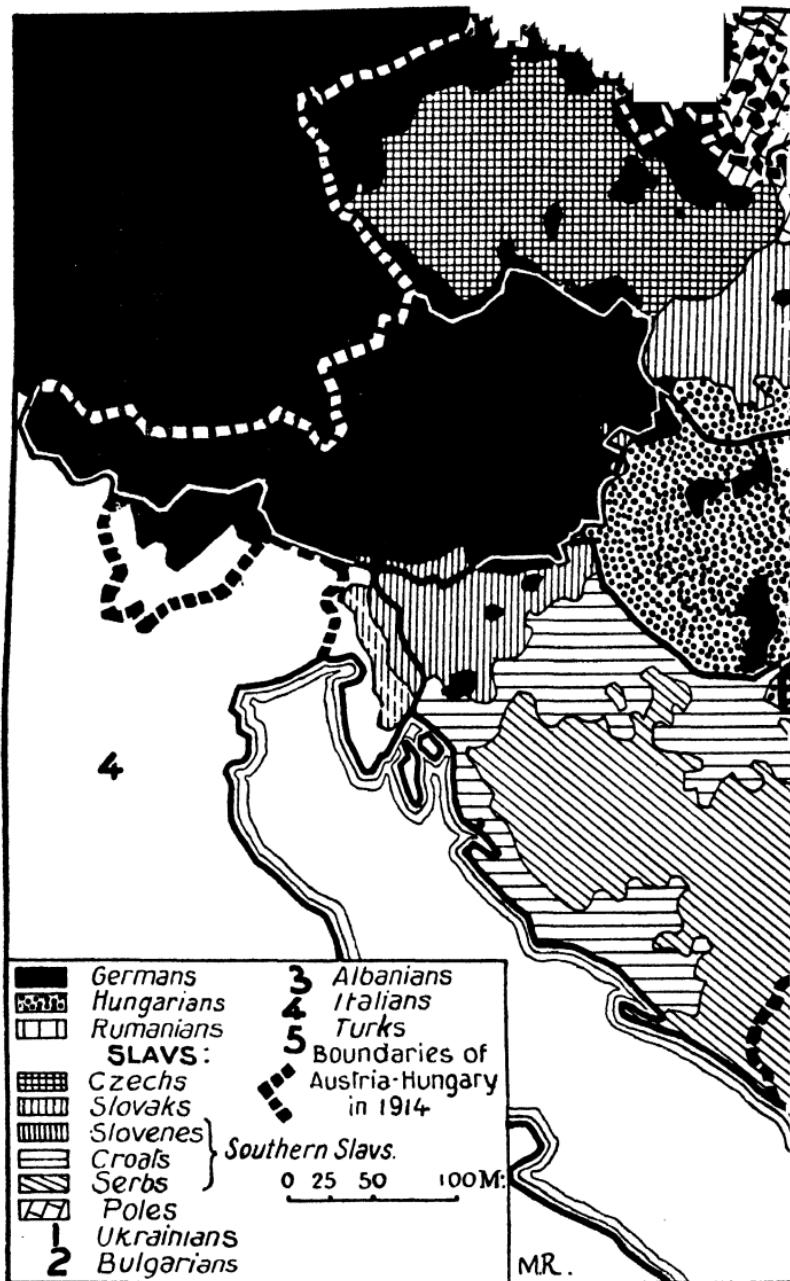
MASARYK'S statesmanship was crowned with success. The war had not yet ended when Austria-Hungary fell to pieces and Czechoslovakia came into existence. The Peace Treaties had only to outline its frontiers and define its international status; the State itself was created and its democratic Government established by the efforts of the Czechs and Slovaks alone. The Allies, seeing the advantage they would gain from the destruction of their enemy's Empire while the war was still being fought, recognised Czechoslovakia's independence before the armistice was signed.

Great Britain, Professor Seton-Watson has argued in *Great Britain and the Dictators*, had no clear war aims. After the creation of an Enemy Propaganda Department under Lord Northcliffe the British Government had, however, to make a definite choice. It had either (1) to work for a separate peace with Austria-Hungary, or (2) to work for the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by actively supporting claims of the subject peoples to independence. The first had been the British aim since the beginning of the War. The military plan in 1914 was to cut off Austria-Hungary from Germany by an advance through those districts which to-day form Czechoslovakia—Silesia, Moravia, Bohemia. Though the Russian offensive failed, this continued to be the British plan until Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill convinced the Cabinet that instead of attacking the main defences, they should attack the "back door." In other words, they should abandon policy (1) for policy (2) and work for the disintegration

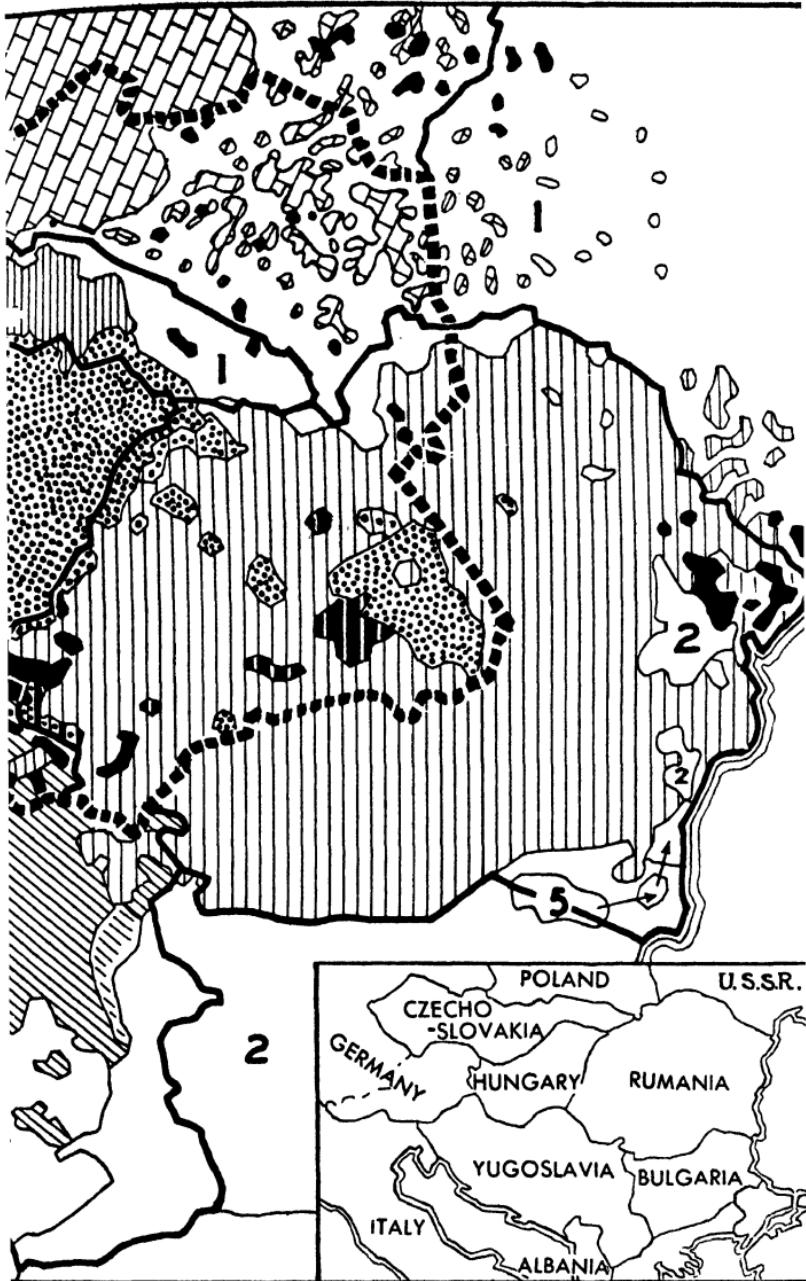
of Austria-Hungary. This required no very great effort on their part but rather a recognition of the efforts of others.

These efforts took three main forms and had three main objectives. There was the propaganda work of Masaryk and Beneš abroad, the aim of which was to obtain the recognition by the Allies of the Czechoslovak claim for independence. There was the political work at home which was parallel to the movement abroad and which aimed at preparing the Czechs and Slovaks themselves for political independence. Lastly, there was the spontaneous revolt of the actual Czech people against the Austro-German war. The Czechs were profoundly anti-militarist because they disliked the Austrian Army, as that immortal Czech War novel, *The Good Soldier Schweig*, reveals. "They join the colours like lambs," said an Austrian General. "They fight like lions, and when we lose they are as happy as sand-boys."

From the moment that war was declared, it was apparent that the Austro-Hungarian Army would barely weather the storm. Scarcely more than a quarter of this polyglot army was Austrian, only 18 per cent Hungarian. The rest, the majority, was Slav and Latin and in no temper to fight the Russians. Unlike the Czechoslovak Army to-day, which is also of mixed nationality, the Austro-Hungarian Army was recruited on a territorial basis so that there were regiments which were entirely Czech or entirely Southern Slav (Serbo-Croat). Czech officers were able, therefore, just to transfer whole detachments from one side of the battle to the other. The Czechs set the example to the other nations of Austria-Hungary. In the first months of the War, the 28th and 36th Common Army Infantry Regiments and the 36th Schützen Regiment, all three Czechoslovak, went over to the Russians. The Austrian High Command hastily ordered a complete reorganisation of the Army. Austrians and Hungarians were drafted into the Slav regiments. Ruthless measures were taken against



3. RACIAL MAP OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, 1914



deserters. A detachment of Czechs, mistaking their German allies for the Russian enemy, deserted boisterously to their side. When they turned out to be Germans, every tenth man was shot.

Desertion and mutiny continued, and the Czech and Southern Slav prisoners of war began to form themselves into legions and return to the front on the Allied side. Before the end of the war there were sixteen divisions of Hapsburg subjects fighting against the Central Powers. There were Czechoslovak legions in Russia, France and Italy. It was the Czech soldiers who formed the backbone of the Brussiloff offensive, and the Czech soldiers in the armies of the Central Powers, which opposed it, who made effective resistance impossible. In less than two days, the Austrian Fourth Army had lost 54 per cent of its effectives, the Seventh Army, 57 per cent. By the middle of 1917, Austria-Hungary had lost more than four million soldiers, of whom nearly two million were prisoners of war, many of whom were actively helping the enemy. Oddly enough, there were even Sudeten Germans fighting in the Czechoslovak legions. When these legions returned from Italy in 1919 and were sent against the Hungarians in Slovakia, whole battalions of Germans, using German words of command, were among them.

Unique in history, a nation was proud of its deserters. The fighting traditions of the Hussites were revived by the soldiers who refused to fight for Austrian imperialism but who, having escaped the horrors of war, came back of their own free will to fight for national liberation. The greatest epic of the war is the story of the Czech legionaries who marched 5,000 miles across Siberia to the Pacific to join their comrades fighting on the Western front. "The pages of history," wrote Mr. Winston Churchill in the *World Crisis*, "recall scarcely any parallel episode at once so romantic in character and so extensive in scale."

The Allies were in need of what armies they could

muster. After the collapse of Russia in 1917 they had only 275 divisions in the field against the 370 divisions of the Central Powers. In the summer of 1918 the Allies officially recognised the Czechoslovak Legions as a belligerent army fighting on their side.

This recognition of enemy deserters as belligerent allies was due to the work of Masaryk and Beneš who saw that desertion in itself was no proof of active support of the Allies and therefore worked night and day to secure the formation of legions from the thousand upon thousand of war prisoners. It was they who encouraged men and boys, weary after months of fighting on the other side, to return to the front and fight again. To fight with the tragic consciousness that they had left comrades on the other side whom, in the smoke of battle, they might kill. Masaryk saw, however, that this was a necessary risk if political independence was to be won. The hereditary bondsmen had to strike the blow which was to make them free.

We have seen how Masaryk realised, at the very beginning of the war, that the historic moment had come. Czechoslovakia must win her freedom from the Hapsburg Empire or perish for ever beneath the great pressure of pan-Germanism which would be the inevitable result of victory for the Central Powers. Masaryk's plan was already worked out. "My programme," he wrote in *The Making of a State*, "was a synthesis of Czech aspirations in the light of our constitutional, historical and natural rights; and I kept the inclusion of Slovakia constantly in view, for I am by descent a Slovak, born in Moravia."

We cannot trace the work of Masaryk and Beneš during the war. Their achievement was prodigious and shows the decisive part played by individuals in the making of a state. Without them, thousands would have died for Czechoslovak freedom; the State might have risen again within its present frontiers, but [who in Western Europe would have realised the significance

of the Czech struggle? Moreover, their revolutionary work as emigrés from a non-existent country has been an historical example not lost upon the world. To-day, when all the despotisms of Europe have driven their best citizens from their country and now threaten the world with war, these citizens will know how best to serve their countries once more and to win, simultaneously, peace and freedom.

The story of the work of the Czechs and Slovaks at home and abroad is an adventure story; their hair-breadth escapes, the dangers which they ran, their hopes and fears and sufferings, are a saga which Czech children will always remember. They will hear of those legionaries who, cut off from the Front by the Russian Civil War and Russia's surrender to Germany, traversed the great Siberian plain on foot in order to continue the fight for their country's freedom. The real story of these years is the story of each individual Czech who had the courage to defy the power of the omnipotent Empires which surrounded him and create from their wreck his own country.

The course of the war was marked by Czechoslovak declarations of independence and defiance. A silent, bloodless revolution took place in the political consciousness of the Czechs and Slovaks as the war went on. "The only revolution which serves its purpose is revolution in heart and mind," wrote Masaryk. "I am a great enemy of revolution by violence. Liberty is strengthened only by liberty, never by violence and bloodshed." The extraordinary feature of the Czech revolution was that though it grew in the hearts and minds of the people during that period of appalling violence and bloodshed, it did not itself lead to violence. The Austro-Hungarian Empire crumbled before the will to freedom of the Czechs and Slovaks, and their daring refusal to fight for a cause not their own. At first the expression of Czech national feeling was muzzled by censorship, imprisonment and death. As the war

progressed and constant reverses at the front made concessions to the subject nations imperative, national aspirations were more and more openly expressed. In May 1917, in the Austrian Parliament, the Czech deputies openly proclaimed their "boundless admiration and enthusiasm" for the March Russian Revolution, and declared "solemnly before the whole world the Czech peoples' will to freedom and independence." And they added: "Not a single drop of blood has willingly been shed by the Czechs on the side of the Central Powers."

The Slovaks were far behind the Czechs in cultural and political development and there were few among them who recognised the significance of the 1914–18 struggle until it was over. The Slovaks were ruled by the Hungarians and were separated from the Czechs by the internal frontier between Hungary and Austria. For the last century they had undergone an intensive process of Magyarisation and before the war they were on the brink of the national extermination which they had resisted for the thousand years of Hungarian domination. In 1914 it is estimated that there were scarcely more than 500 Slovak families who were nationally conscious, and it was not until 1918 that the Slovaks began to take an active part. There were individual Slovaks co-operating with the Czechs, like Štefánik who worked with Masaryk and Beneš, like Hodža who worked with the Czechs in Vienna, and the young generation of Slovaks who had studied under Masaryk in Prague. But no really representative Assembly met until October 1918, even though by that time the Allies had recognised the existence of a *Czechoslovak* nation and *Czechoslovak* armies.

The greater part of the preparation for separating Slovakia from Hungary and attaching it to the Czech lands was done from outside, by the Slovak colonists in America, and by the Czech political leaders at home and abroad. Proof that not only Masaryk but all the Czechs were actively working for the liberation of

Slovakia was given in the official declaration of the reason for the arrest of Dr. Kramář (later, the first Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia) in 1915: "The object of the above Associations is the independence of the lands of the Bohemian crown, including Hungarian Slovakia."

The Allies accepted the Slovaks with the Czechs, and in June the French Government presented colours to the *Czechoslovak* Army fighting on French soil, and in August the British Government recognised the *Czechoslovak* Council in London as "the present trustee of the future *Czechoslovak* Government" and the *Czechoslovaks* as belligerents. On June 28th, 1918, Mr. Lansing, the American Secretary of State, declared that "America desires that all branches of the Slav race should be completely freed from German and Austrian rule." Thus even before the armistice was signed, the independence of Czechoslovakia had been recognised and the Czechs and Slovaks were recognised as a single belligerent Allied nation. The justification for their recognition as belligerents was the presence at the front of *Czechoslovak* legions. The justification for the recognition of *Czechoslovak* independence was the course of events in Austria-Hungary.

In May, 1917, the Czech deputies in the Austrian Parliament made a constitutional Declaration in which they demanded the right to found an autonomous Czech State which would include the then Hungarian province of Slovakia. This demand for the "union of all Czechs and Slovaks in a single Bohemian State" was the first public statement to this effect made by the Czech leaders at home, and their declarations grew steadily more radical throughout that summer, and the succeeding year. "Thenceforward," writes Mr. Macartney in *Hungary and her Successors*, "the destiny of the Slovaks was firmly linked to that of the Czechs. As the latter advanced towards independence they carried the former with them."

By October, 1918, Slovak declarations were being

added to the Czech. On October 18th the Czech National Council in London declared Czechoslovak Independence and Unity, and Stefanik spoke in the name of Slovakia though he had no direct authority to do so. On October 19th Father Juriga, one of the two Slovak deputies in the Hungarian Parliament, unaware of these events in London, declared that a Slovak National Council already existed, that the Slovaks could not accept the decisions of the Hungarian Parliament and that they claimed a separate representation at the Peace Conference. Finally, on October 28th and 29th, representatives came from all over Slovakia to an Assembly summoned by the Slovak National Council at Turciansky Svaty Martin, and issued the following declaration which should be taken as the nearest possible expression of Slovak ideals at this time:

“The Slovak Nation is part of the Czechoslovak nation—one with it in language and in the history of its civilisation. In all the struggles in which the Czech people has engaged, which have made it famous throughout the world, the Slovak branch has also taken part. We also claim for this, the Czechoslovak nation, the absolute right to self-determination on a basis of complete independence. By virtue of this principle we express our agreement with the new principle of international law, formulated on October 11th by President Wilson, and recognised on October 28th by the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs.”

The last two sentences were added later and seen only by the majority and not by all the signatories of the original declaration, several of whom had already returned home when news of the Foreign Minister's note came through. This final draft also omitted a passage on separate representation at the Peace Conference. Hodža maintained that from the moment the Slovaks accepted the Czechoslovak State they accepted the Czechoslovak Government, and the way in which it was represented at the Peace Conference. This later

became a bone of contention between the Slovak autonomists and centralists—a controversy which we will discuss later. The desire then and now of the overwhelming majority of Slovaks to form an integral part of the Czechoslovak State could not be doubted.

The Czechs and Slovaks were not alone in their demand for national freedom. The privileged Poles had already secured Austrian recognition of the restoration of Poland. The Southern Slavs, the Rumanians, the Italians under Austro-Hungarian rule, were all demanding liberation. By the autumn of 1918 even the Hungarians and Germans were putting forward their own special plans for the reorganisation of the Dual Monarchy. The Hungarians were alarmed at the Czech demand for union with the Slovaks, and at the Croat demand for union in a Yugo-Slav State with the Southern Slavs under Hungarian control. For these demands cut at the basis of the Dual Monarchy set up in 1867.

Even the German Austrians themselves turned finally against the Empire. There had always been a pan-German opposition to the Dual Monarchy. This came not only from Germany but as we have seen, existed inside the Dual Monarchy itself, and its ideas were precisely those which Hitler, himself an Austrian, represents to-day. Though the middle-class nationalist parties appreciated the advantages of Austrian rule over the Slav races in the Empire, the Social Democrats, in whom the pan-German tradition was equally strong, advocated the cause of a powerful and united Germany which would allow self-determination to the subject races of the Dual Monarchy. In the last years of the war it was becoming increasingly clear that the Dual Monarchy would not survive in the form in which it had entered the war, and that if Austrian hegemony was to continue it must free itself from its obsolescent monarchy. Throughout 1918, therefore, there was increasing hostility towards the Hapsburgs among the Austrians, while nationalist and socialist opinion was growing closer and closer

together. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the Right Wing of the Socialist Party had gained an ascendancy over the more revolutionary pan-Germanism of the Left. The experience of the war brought the Party back, however, to the original revolutionary programme of 1848. "The absolute decomposition of Austria," said Engels, "is the first essential of German unity."

Before the German Austrians could accept the complete disruption of the Empire, a last attempt was made to secure a "Western Austria". It was suggested by the Austrian Socialists in the Vienna Parliament in October, 1918, that the Austrians, the Sudeten Germans, the Czechs and the Yugoslavs should form autonomous districts within a "Western Austria". They should draw up their own constitutions and then decide jointly what matters should remain common to them all. The Czechs were thus asked to forgo union with the Slovaks, the Southern Slavs (Croats, Slovenes and Serbs) to forgo union with the Southern Slavs either of Hungary or of Serbia. As Professor Namier wrote: "This was chastened German nationalism. The form changed, the substance remained the same. . . . They would talk to the Czechs because of the German minorities comprised in their provinces, and to the Slovenes whose territories intervened between them and the sea. They would talk to their kinsmen in Germany."

This was the programme which, at the beginning of October, was accepted by the three German groups in Austria; the National Union, the Christian Socialists and the Socialists—the Christian Socialists only after long hesitation. On October 24th an Austrian National Assembly was set up in Vienna.

But it was a programme wholly unacceptable to the Czechs who saw in it an attempt to deprive them of their "historical" frontiers as well as of their "national unity"—union with the Slovaks. It meant that the Czechs either had to surrender their national independence or see the natural boundaries of their State

obliterated. "The German mountain fringe cannot be separated from the Czech plain," writes Professor Namier in the *History of the Peace Conference*. "Statehood, attained by such a carving-out of territory as could never form an independent State, would indeed have been a Danaan gift for the Czechs."

Meanwhile, desperate efforts were being made by the Imperial Government to hold the disintegrating Empire together, but all were in vain. On October 16th an Imperial Manifesto proclaimed the federalisation of Austria. On the same day the Czechs and Southern Slavs made a joint declaration that their demands were "international problems (which) could only be satisfactorily solved at the general peace conference." Three days later they confirmed this declaration by refusing any further discussions with Vienna and Budapest. Meanwhile, a parallel movement was proceeding abroad. On October 14th, in Paris, Dr. Beneš, the General Secretary of the National Council, informed the Great Powers that a provisional Czechoslovak Government had been formed in Paris, and four days later this Government declared the independence of Czechoslovakia.

The final blow to the tottering edifice of the Dual Monarchy came on October 18th, when President Wilson sent a note to the Austrian Government re-affirming America's recognition of a belligerent Czechoslovak Government and the justice of the Southern Slav claims. Peace, President Wilson declared, could only be recognised on a basis satisfactory to those two powers. On 27th October the Austrian Government accepted these terms. This was the signal. On October 28th, after a bloodless revolution in Prague, the independence of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed. The following day the independence of the Southern Slav provinces was declared at Zagreb (Agram). Two days later there was a revolution in Budapest. On November 11th the Austrian Republic was proclaimed in Vienna, and the

Emperor Charles abdicated. Five days later the Hungarian Republic was proclaimed. On December 1st Rumanian Unity was declared at Alba Julia, and Southern Slav unity in Belgrade.

The Czechs and Austrians both claimed the Sudeten German regions, and both prepared to fight for their own way. The Sudeten Germans are accused by the Czechs of having been, even before the war, in touch with the Berlin Nationalist leaders. A week before the revolution in Prague on October 22nd, 1918, three German deputies, of whom two came from the Sudeten-German districts and one from Austria, took the train for Berlin. On the way back, under cover of making arrangements to aid the Sudeten-German districts with food supplies from Saxony, they stopped at Dresden. They are said to have made arrangements for German troops to occupy the Czech-German districts in the event of a Czech declaration of independence or an Austrian defection from the Austro-German alliance. Apparently both Berlin and Dresden promised them military support.

Less than a week later, on October 28th, Czechoslovak Independence was declared, and the Czechs took over the administration of Prague and began slowly to take over the administration of the province of Bohemia. On October 29th the Sudeten Germans declared the independence of Deutschböhmen (German Bohemia) and constituted it as an autonomous district of Austria. Within the next few days the districts of "Sudetenland" (German districts of Moravia and Silesia), Böhmerwald and South German Moravia were declared independent of the Czech districts and were re-attached to Vienna. On the 30th of October the Austrian National Assembly in Vienna sent a note to President Wilson demanding the recognition of their right to self-determination. If this right had been recognised the independence of the Czech State would have been jeopardised, if not actually destroyed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Czechs put up a sturdy resistance, especially as much

of the territory involved was mixed Czech and Sudeten German.

The Czech representatives in Paris had already gained the support of France for the maintenance of the historical frontiers of the Czech lands. At home the Czechs set about presenting the Peace Conference with a *fait accompli*. Negotiations were opened for the Germans by Dr. Lodgman and for the Czechs by Dr. Bechyně. At first, these were amicable and even useful, so far as the immediate organisation of food supplies, transport, etc., was concerned. They soon broke down, however, on the cardinal question of the incorporation of the German-speaking districts within the new State of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs began to treat the Germans not as the representatives of an independent State but as rebellious citizens of their own. It is still disputed whether or not the Sudeten Germans were asked to co-operate in the building of the new State. Usually, reliable Czech sources state that Švehla, one of the leading Czech Agrarians (the Prime Minister who in 1926 first brought German Ministers into the Cabinet), offered Lodgman German representation in the National Committee and in the National Assembly which drew up the Czech Constitution. Dr. Lodgman himself, however, emphatically denies this. The Independence Movement of Lodgman and the Sudeten Germans, however, was so strong, that even if such co-operation had been offered it is doubtful if it would have been accepted; German-Czech antagonism was undoubtedly very bitter in 1918-19. Many of the Germans, however, urged moderation on their supporters, confident that a decision favourable to them would be reached by the Peace Conference.

Slowly, at the end of November, the Czechs began to move in troops. These had been asked for by the Mayor of Leitmeritz and Aussig on November 11th, so that order might be restored. Disorders had broken out in Aussig and in many of the mining districts, as a result of the spread of revolutionary doctrines,

German middle classes appealed to Czech soldiers against German workers. No troops were sent by the Germans in spite of promises which appear to have been made to the Sudeten deputies who visited Berlin and Dresden in October. This was due, it seems, to the collapse in Germany and the refusal by the new officials to keep the promises of the old. Germany herself had rejected their demand to become part of Germany. This demand was put forward in February, 1919, by the provisional Provincial Assembly of the Sudeten German districts, which had been constituted in Vienna. The steady advice which Berlin gave to the Sudeten Germans was to accept union with Czechoslovakia, and to limit themselves to a demand for autonomy. On May 11th the German Government finally stated it could do nothing for them, and asked them not to persist in action which only made Germany's position at the Peace Conference more difficult. Therefore no change was made. The Czech-German frontier remained as it had been before the war.

The Sudeten Germans were thus deprived of the hope, long cherished by many of them, of a German Mittel Europa, which would unite Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. The revolutions in Germany and Austria rid the Sudeten Germans of the Hapsburg-Hohenzollern conflict of loyalties which had divided those who looked to Vienna from those who looked to Berlin. The insistence of the Allies on the independence of Austria kept this division alive, and even in the Henlein Party till March of this year there were those who looked to Othmar Spann, the Viennese philosopher of the Corporate State, and those who look to Hitler and National Socialism. The conquest of Austria, and the arrest of Spann by the Nazis has now crushed any significant Austrian loyalty which had survived these twenty years. To-day the division is between those who are loyal to the democratic Czechoslovakia state and those who covet a corner in the Nazi Empire.

## CHAPTER V

### GERMAN PLANS FOR CENTRAL EUROPE

THE war was over, Germany defeated, Austria-Hungary destroyed and Czechoslovakia had arisen. Freedom had been won but not for the Czechs alone. Central Europe was organised afresh on the basis of the political rights won for Western Europe, more than a century previously, by the French Revolution. Freedom and equality applied to peoples meant the end of European imperialism and the rights of small nations to independent existence.

Central Europe was entirely reconstructed and a new solution was found for the Central European problem which, directly or indirectly, had been responsible for six wars within a period of fifty years. To-day, after twenty years of peace, it is this solution which is being challenged. The challenge takes the form of a Nazi threat to Czechoslovakia; but this German-Czech conflict is by no means the whole of the Central European problem, nor did this problem originate with the foundation of Czechoslovakia, in 1918. If Czechoslovakia were to lose its independence or be destroyed, the problem would still remain to be solved. For the problem of Central Europe is not only a matter of within what frontiers the peoples are to be organised, but is a struggle for power extending far beyond the confines of Central Europe itself.

The problem arises from the attempt of the three powers, Germany, Russia, Italy, to penetrate and dominate the area occupied by the small nations of the Baltic, the Danubian Basin and the Balkans. The

problem became acute with the rise of modern nationalism after the French Revolution.

The national idea of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an attempt to realise between nations the ideas of the liberty and equality of rights which individuals had already won in Western Europe. Once the right of an individual to liberty and equality had been accepted, it was inevitable that each nation should demand the same rights for itself. The dominating feature of the nineteenth century, as of the twentieth century, was the demand by every European nation for independence, in other words, to be free, equal and united.

In the area lying between the Rhine, the Dniester, the Baltic and the Aegean live different races and nations mutually hostile and suspicious but mixed and mingled so that no clear delimitation on a national or racial basis is possible. The inevitable tendency, therefore, has been for the larger nations, after they had achieved their own unity and independence, to exploit this situation to their own advantage and to deny to the small nations the rights which they had won for themselves.

The largest single group was the German but even the Germans did not achieve any great measure of political unity till less than eighty years ago, and though since 1867 Germany has gradually absorbed more and more provinces within a national frontier, there are still living beyond the German frontiers over ten million people who speak German and are considered by the Nazis to be of German "nationality," even though they are citizens of Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, etc., as the case may be.

Before the growth of nationalism, and above all of National Socialism, it was not impossible to be at one and the same time a good German and a good citizen of another country. Germans had emigrated or been invited as capable craftsmen to neighbouring

countries and to the more distant countries of South-eastern Europe. They settled down in their new homes without political ambitions or the consciousness of being the colonists of a future German Empire. They lived peaceably and quietly and were welcomed as a progressive and efficient element.

The Nazis, however, changed all this: for the first time a pan-German, Adolf Hitler, occupied the German "throne." The conflict between Czechoslovakia and Germany over the position of the Sudeten Germans living in Czechoslovakia has proved, once and for all, that it is not possible for a German to be both a Nazi and a loyal citizen of the country to which he belongs. The conflict of loyalties imposed on Germans by the Nazi creed is only resolved when the country of their adoption is subordinated entirely to Germany. By means of the German minorities all over the world, the Nazis aim at the creation of a vast German Empire.

This pan-German solution for the problem of Central Europe is not, luckily, the only one, and, before Hitler, it was not even a solution put forward by official Germany. If a solution is to be found to-day, it is necessary to retrace the history of Central Europe and see what solutions have been tried in the past.

There have been three more or less German solutions of the Central European problem. The solution which Bismarck made; the policy of his successors which led to the war of 1914–18; and the settlement planned by the military leaders of Germany, which might have been imposed on the world had the outcome of the war been successful for the Germans rather than for the Allies.

It is due to Bismarck that "Prussia" was transformed into "Germany" and that by defeating France Germany became the strongest European State.

Bismarck saw very clearly the interdependence of Eastern and Western security which became the key-principle of French post-war policy, and he always



4. BISMARCK'S EUROPE, 1871

tried to prevent an alliance between Germany's western and her eastern neighbours.

Prussia, he realised, in order to be strong, must first defeat Austria and France. Austria was usually regarded as the leader of the German States and France was the foremost power of Europe. Thanks to the negligence of the French Government, Bismarck was able to defeat singly these two States whose combined defence would have resulted in the defeat of Prussia. Bismarck defeated Austria in 1866 at the Battle of Königgrätz (Sadowa). We have already seen how contemptuous the Austrians were of the Prussian forces. The French made the same mistake and too late they realised that a Germany, which turned from victory in Central Europe to an attack on the west, must be stronger than France. "It was France, not Austria," said Marshal Randon bitterly, "who was defeated at Sadowa." Four years later France was defeated again, this time on her own territory.

The present situation presents a striking parallel to the history of Franco-German relations between 1866 and 1870. "Whatever Government may be in power," writes Hitler in his still official book *Mein Kampf*, "France is and remains the deadly enemy of the German people." This was Bismarck's opinion also.

Yet Hitler's entire attention appears to be devoted to the coercion of Czechoslovakia—the last remaining heir of pre-war Austria.

The presence, however, of a German military mission with General Franco in Spain betrays that Czechoslovakia is not in fact Hitler's only or even isolated consideration. "In the event of a war between France and Germany," said Bismarck, "Spain is worth one to two army corps to us. If the Spanish Government were in sympathy with us, France would have to despatch an army corps to the Spanish frontier; if not, French troops would be released by Spain and be available against Germany."

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Experience learnt from Bismarck has made the position for Hitler to-day somewhat worse than that which his predecessor had to face in 1866-70. In the first place, the Czechs have the control of their own passes and have no obligation to ask Vienna's permission to fortify them against a German attack: Königgrätz is to-day the strongest point in the Czech fortifications. Secondly, the French have also learnt the importance of Central Europe for their own security and to-day France has a strong defensive alliance with Czechoslovakia. To-day, therefore, Hitler would have much trouble in defeating first Czechoslovakia and then France. He could certainly not do so without a world war and even Hitler must fear that in a world war Nazi Germany risks defeat. His aim therefore, if possible, is to secure the bloodless capitulation of Czechoslovakia and he is doing what we have seen the King of Prussia hesitated to do "out of loyalty" even in war time—he is encouraging the Sudeten Germans to revolt.

Bismarck defeated Austria; and four years later he defeated France. His solution was not, however, the pan-German solution which Hitler proposes to-day. He took no territory from Austria. From France he took Alsace-Lorraine whose possession he considered "the only sure means of defence against a neighbouring nation of such restless disposition and commanding such formidable armaments as the French. The possession of Strasbourg and Metz is for Germany a national necessity and not a matter of *amour propre*" (Bismarck).

In Central Europe, however, except for the unification of the South German Provinces in one Empire with Prussia, Bismarck made no new territorial adjustments. In spite of his own view that "he who is master of Bohemia, is master of Europe," Bismarck refused to advance after the defeat of Austria or to annex either Czechs or Sudeten Germans. Bismarck considered the right

settlement for Central Europe to be a well balanced system of Great Powers, each holding the other in check, mutually combining and if necessary making war on each other when their vital interests are threatened.

So far from being hostile to Austria, as Hitler was even when he was an obscure Austrian subject painting houses in Vienna before the war, Bismarck considered the Austrian Empire to be an essential part of the Central European system. The best short account of Bismarck's intentions is given in Brandenburg's *From Bismarck to the World War*.

"Our great statesman (Bismarck)," he writes, "was of the opinion that we had everything we really needed and that war, even a victorious war, did not offer any actual gain. On the North and the West our territory had actually reached, and occasionally even exceeded, the limits of our nationality. No thoughtful German has ever wanted to add German Switzerland or Holland to our Empire. To bring the German provinces of Austria once more into our national State has seemed to many a desirable aim, and to not a few simply a matter of duty. Nevertheless it was in Catholic Southern Germany that these aspirations flourished rather than in the Protestant North which had taken the leading part in the new Empire. Bismarck always maintained that the inclusion of the Catholic German Austrians would strengthen the centrifugal forces within the Empire; but on the other hand he considered the collapse of Austria a national danger, since the majority of the non-German territories were inhabited by a Slav population who would naturally turn to Russia if the Hapsburg monarchy were dissolved. Such an accession to Russia's power seemed to him ominous both for Germany and for Europe. Hence the maintenance of Austria-Hungary's position as a great power became one of the corner-stones of his policy; and so long as he was at the helm and his influence persisted all thoughts of increase of territory in the South-east were barred. . . . These facts and

considerations led Bismarck to the conclusion that we (Germany) had nothing to gain even from a victorious war in Europe. Besides, our newly-created (German) Empire was, so to speak, still in process of formation; time alone would test the new arrangements and prove their worth; sharp differences in religious and social matters constituted a serious menace to us; and finally our budding prosperity urgently required peace. Maintenance of existing conditions and of peace had to be the cardinal point of German policy."

To this end, therefore, Bismarck allied his country with Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy and tried to maintain peace and the interests of Germany in Central Europe by playing off these powers one against the other.

In other words, Bismarck's solution of the Central European problem was the imperialist solution—the subordination of the peoples living in that area to the interest of the Great Powers. Germany's place, as Bismarck saw it, was to hold the balance of Europe and maintain the peace whose terms he himself had dictated.

But the successors of Bismarck were not satisfied with his definition of Germany as a satiated power. They maintained that Germany had reason to regard herself as satiated only when her capacity to expand was opposed by a force stronger than herself. Bismarck created for Germany the same problem which Hitler is creating. Ambitions inevitably expand with the capacity to realise them. The events of the present time recall the sickening experience that each new concession wrung from Europe brought the war of 1914-18 nearer. Bismarck himself regarded Germany as satisfied, but he made it possible for his successors to consider further expansion. It was the difference between the Kaiser's expansionist ideas and Bismarck's "limited ends" which was chiefly responsible for the World War.

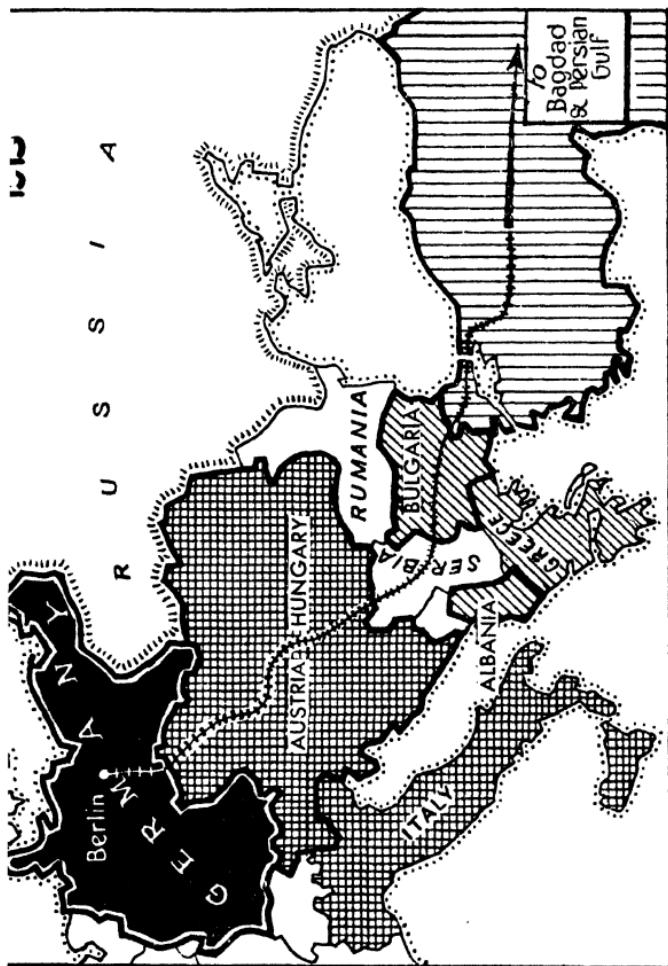
It is difficult to disentangle from the various, contradictory and exuberant ambitions of the Kaiser the real policy of pre-war Germany. From the point of view of the present situation, the most interesting criticism of German pre-war policy is that of Hitler himself.

The German problem, he writes in *Mein Kampf*, was to find the possibility of maintaining a yearly increase in the population of 900,000. The first was internal colonisation—a policy strictly limited by the capacity of the soil. The second was “*bodenpolitik*,” a policy of European expansion, and the third a policy of extra-European colonisation and foreign trade. It was ridiculous, he writes, to consider that even the third of these alternatives would not necessitate a war. The country which epitomised this policy—England—had shown well enough how many wars it needed to make an Empire, and this policy, when pursued by Germany, would inevitably arouse British hostility. The policy of European expansion also, of course, meant war. “*Land and soil*,” he writes, “is for the people who have the strength to take it and the diligence to cultivate it. Nature knows no political frontiers.” If Germany expands it is obvious that the instinct of self-preservation will make the other powers defend themselves. Right is determined by might. (p. 147). He derides the idea that Germany could have won the position of a world power through peaceful commercial penetration. War was a necessity, therefore the only question for Germany was: “War with whom and for which purpose—colonies or European expansion?” Obviously, the only colonies which would solve Germany’s population problems were colonies inhabitable for Europeans and an attempt to take these would, he considered, be most costly. Far more useful to Germany was a policy of European expansion. This could only be done at the expense of Russia. Therefore it was absolutely necessary for Germany to make at all costs an alliance with England. “No sacrifice,” he writes, “should have been too

great for this. Colonies and sea power should have been renounced, no competition with British industry should have been allowed, the whole of Germany's strength should have been concentrated in the Army. The result would of course have been a passing restriction but ultimately a great and powerful future." Hitler does not specify what would have been Germany's attitude to England after the "passing restriction" had attained its purpose.

In fact, as Hitler knew only too well at the time of writing, things turned out somewhat differently, and Germany entered the war on the side of Austria-Hungary against not only France and Russia, but against England and Italy as well. Hitler's only consolation was that Austria-Hungary was also involved in the war and on the side of Germany. Hitler's great fear had been that the Austrians would try and remain neutral, should Germany be involved in war. To his mind, the motive of the Austro-German alliance was the maintenance of peace, whereas according to Hitler "an alliance whose purpose does not comprise the intention to make war is senseless and worthless. Alliances are made only for fighting." The Austro-German alliance had, he feared, quite a different purpose. "This State mummy," he writes, "allied itself to Germany not in order to carry through a war but in order to maintain eternal peace which could be cleverly used, slowly but surely, to exterminate the German character of the (Hapsburg) monarchy."

The settlement of Central Europe, intended by the Kaiser before the war broke out, is far from clear. The difference between his own ambitious plans and the "limited ends" of Bismarck was in any case disastrous for peace. Under the Kaiser, Germany not only encouraged the Austrian Empire in its own imperialism, backed Austria openly against Russia, but started on ambitious plans of her own. A German candidate was favoured for the throne of Bulgaria, a Hobenzothern



German ally █ German sovereigns █ German military mission +++++ "Berlin - Bagdad" projected r.l.Y

### 5. THE KAISER'S EUROPE, 1913

sat on the throne of Greece, a German prince sent to rule in Albania, a German general to organise the Turkish Army. The pan-German ambition of a vast German Empire, stretching from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf was credited as the serious design of the German Government by those who watched the building of the Berlin-Baghdad railway, the increasingly close co-operation of Germany and Austria in the Balkans, and German activity in the Near East. (See map 5.)

It is a matter of dispute whether the war interrupted German plans or was deliberately undertaken by Germany in order to further these plans. What would have been the system set up in Central Europe, had the Central Powers won the war, remains a matter of speculation. It is certain, however, that the map would not have survived intact. The Russian successes against the Austro-Hungarian Army in the early part of the war, made the Dual Monarchy more and more dependent on Germany, as well as exasperating the German military rulers against Austria. Hindenburg is even credited with having remarked, in a moment of special exasperation, that the next war would have to be against Austria. In spite, however—or perhaps because of the perpetual friction between Germans, Austrians and Hungarians there seems to have been a reconciliation during the war between the pan-German idea of an exclusively German speaking Middle Europe and the Austrian idea of a multi-national Empire ruled by the German-Austrians. A map was served out by the German authorities to the fighting troops which showed a post-war Germany extending to and including St. Petersburg and with the word AUSTRIA written over Moscow.

In 1915 Friedrich Naumann, an ex-German parson, a member of the Reichstag, drafted a scheme of a German Middle Europe which was to unite all the countries of the Danube, the Balkans and the Near East, including

Turkey, Mesopotamia and Palestine, under German control.

The only certain proof we have, however, of what was in the minds of the German General Staff, are the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and of Bucharest.

The former is described by Wheeler Bennett as a treaty "which for a peace of humiliation is without precedent or equal in modern history."

"By the former, Russia lost a territory," he writes, "nearly as large as Austria-Hungary and Turkey combined: 56 million inhabitants or 32 per cent of the whole population of the country; a third of her railway mileages; 73 per cent of her total iron and 89 per cent of her total coal production; over 5,000 factories, mills, distilleries and refineries. By a supplementary agreement signed in August she paid Germany an indemnity of 6,000 million marks."

By the treaty of Bucharest, Rumania was reduced to economic servitude for she too was cut off from the Black Sea and merely given the use of Constanza. Germany leased her oil wells for ninety years, and her agricultural products, together with those of Ukraine, were earmarked for the benefit of the Central Powers.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk gave the Central Powers full control of Poland, Finland and the Baltic States, practically cutting Russia from the Baltic Sea. In the South it detached the Ukraine from Russia and severed Russia's main access to the Black Sea. Germany and Austria-Hungary together secured the absolute domination of the Central European zone. Russia was defeated, Italy was excluded. The nations themselves were bowed down under the German armies. Naumann's German Mitteleuropa was achieved. (See map 6.)

It is only fair to say that the German foreign minister, Herr von Kuhlmann, was very much opposed to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and together with General Hoffmann he managed for a short time to influence the Kaiser against the policy of Ludendorff and Hindenburg.



## 6. EUROPE IN MARCH 1918

It seems that Herr von Kuhlmann was already convinced that the Central Powers could not win the war and therefore feared to make this German peace a precedent for allied terms (and indeed the worst clause of Versailles was mild compared with Brest-Litovsk). America had her eye on the Treaty as the following speech of President Wilson shows, Jan. 8th, 1918:

"That programme proposed no concessions at all either to the sovereignty of Russia or to the populations with whose fortunes it dealt, but meant in a word that the Central Empires were to keep every part of territory their armed forces had occupied—every province, every city, every point of vantage—as a permanent addition to their territories and their power.

"It is a reasonable conjecture that the general principle of settlement which they at first suggested originated with the more liberal statesmen of Germany and Austria, the men who had begun to feel the force of their own people's thought and purpose, while the concrete terms of actual settlement came from the military leaders who have no thought but to keep what they have got. . . . The Russian representatives cannot entertain such proposals of conquest and domination."

Wilson was right in his estimate of the aims of "the more liberal statesmen of Germany and Austria."

"The German Foreign Minister was also opposed on every ground to the annexation of two million more Slavs to the German Empire and merely 'sought to provide himself with sufficient bargaining material in the East to ensure against annexation on Germany's Western frontier.' He was over-ridden by the cold-blooded arguments of the High Command."

"But why," Wheeler Bennett reports Kuhlmann once asked Hindenburg during one of their not infrequent acrimonious discussions at Kreuznach, "do you so particularly want these territories?"

"I need them for the manœuvring of my Left Wing in the next war," was the Marshal's reply; and Ludendorff explained that Courland and Lithuania would improve Germany's food supply and bring her additional man-power in case she should, in a future war, have to rely once more upon her own resources.

One of the main purposes of the peace with Russia was to enable the High Command to transfer an overwhelming number of troops to the Western Front. As Hitler points out in his analysis of pre-war German policy, the disastrous mistake was simultaneously to alienate both Russia and England so that Germany was forced to fight on two fronts. Thanks to the presence of an ally on the East of Germany, the British and the French were able to hold up and ultimately defeat the German Army on the Western Front. Since the war there have been acrimonious attacks on the inefficiency of the Russian Army and to-day doubt of Russian capacity is put forward as a weighty reason for not pursuing closer co-operation with the Soviet Union, even though Czechoslovakia alone has a military capacity in many ways equal to that of Tsarist Russia. It is therefore well to remember that even after the defeat of Russia, when Russia was torn by civil war, the Germans had to leave over a million soldiers in the East in order to enforce the Peace of Brest-Litovsk. It may have been this which won us the war. "An additional 500,000 men in the West in April 1918," writes Wheeler Bennett, "might very well have turned the scale in favour of Germany."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ALLIED SETTLEMENT

IN 1918, both Russia and Germany were defeated and the problem of Central Europe had to be solved afresh. Bismarck's solution of the balance of Empires had been rejected by the new advisers of the Kaiser. Their solution had failed in the disaster of 1914-18. The Allied statesmen met in Paris to draw up a new settlement. The result was the Treaty of Versailles which applied to Germany; the Treaties of St. Germain and Trianon which applied to former Austria-Hungary. The real evil of the Peace Treaties was the "Versailles system" which applied entirely in Western Europe. The real good was the reconstruction of Central and Eastern Europe on the basis of the rights of small nations. The Versailles system has now been entirely ended. The settlement which Nazi Germany is challenging to-day is no longer Versailles but the treaty of St. Germain. Nazi Germany is claiming to be the heir of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its pretensions are those of the Germany of 1917.

It is fashionable to-day to abuse the Treaty of Versailles. Among none is it so fashionable as among the British friends of Herr Hitler, and—a curious mark of friendship—they chiefly blame the Treaty for the appearance of Herr Hitler himself. Ardent Nazis affirm in one and the same breath that though Hitler represents the "real and eternal Germany," it is certainly the fault of the Allies that Germany has been driven under his leadership.

The chief fault of the Versailles Treaty was its mistaken application. We treated the German Government of

1920 as if it had been the Government of 1914 or the Government of 1938. We outlined for a Germany struggling to be pacifist and democratic, terms suitable for the military Prussian State. By doing this we humiliated the democratic Government in the eyes of its own people and discredited a régime which was attempting to make Germany liberal and free. This attempt alone was a hard enough task for the rulers of the Weimar Republic, and it must be admitted that it was very poorly performed. *Der Kaiser ging, die Generale blieben*—“The Kaiser went, the Generals stayed”—was the eloquent title of a post-war German novel. The Germans were as incapable of revolution in 1918 as they were in 1848. There was revolutionary ardour and revolutionary thinking, but no revolutionary acting. The old rulers stayed on in their places. The Prussian Junkers remained on their vast estates and no Government dared to introduce land reform. The Army was decimated but the old generals remained and the Reischwehr system continued as an interrupted but not ended tradition. In the Wilhelmstrasse the old diplomats remained and no new conception of German foreign policy found the light. In these circumstances the neighbours of Germany pursued a suspicious and apparently vindictive policy towards Germany after the war. This is understandable, but the added burden of humiliation and shame which was imposed upon the Weimar Government weakened its hand against its internal enemies and confirmed the nationalist tendencies of German foreign policy. The Germany of Bismarck sacrificed freedom at home for power abroad. The Germany of Weimar again learnt the false lesson that relative freedom at home meant humiliation abroad.

In 1848, the year of revolution, Germany had set the example of a nation which wanted both to be free and united, though even then, as we have seen, there was a trace of pan-German imperialism in it, hostile to the freedom of others. But the impulse to freedom

was perverted by Bismarck, whose idea of German unity was based on the idea of a greater Prussia in which neither liberalism of thought nor political freedom were encouraged. German unity, when it came, was without the spirit which marked its early aspirations or the spirit which inspired Italian unity. "In Italy," writes H. A. L. Fisher, "the triumph of nationalism was associated with the establishment of Parliamentary Government on the English plan; in Germany with its defeat."

In 1918 another attempt was made to give Germany Parliamentary Government and a constitution which would give popular control over finance, the Army and foreign policy. The tragedy of the Versailles Treaty was that this attempt at a liberal Government was discredited and Germany had to turn to the Nazis before she could impress the French and the British Governments. But it was a vicious circle. The failure to produce a European conception of German foreign policy encouraged the maintenance of the Versailles system, and the Versailles system itself helped to the saddle in Germany a group of men without a sense of Europe's needs, and who utterly rejected all European values. The Versailles Treaty kept the Germans nationalistic. The Government was forced into the position of either tolerating nationalist agitation against the treaty or, by disowning it, laying itself open to the charge of willing self-abasement. The Republic was admittedly weak. "Thanks to a bad peace," writes Edgar Mowrer, "the German people became quite logically nationalistic. That they reverted to their former traditional submissiveness to internal autocrats was almost exclusively due to the supine passivity of the Republican rulers in allowing their State to be flouted and derided with impunity by generals, ex-sovereigns and nobles, judges, officials and adventurers."<sup>1</sup>

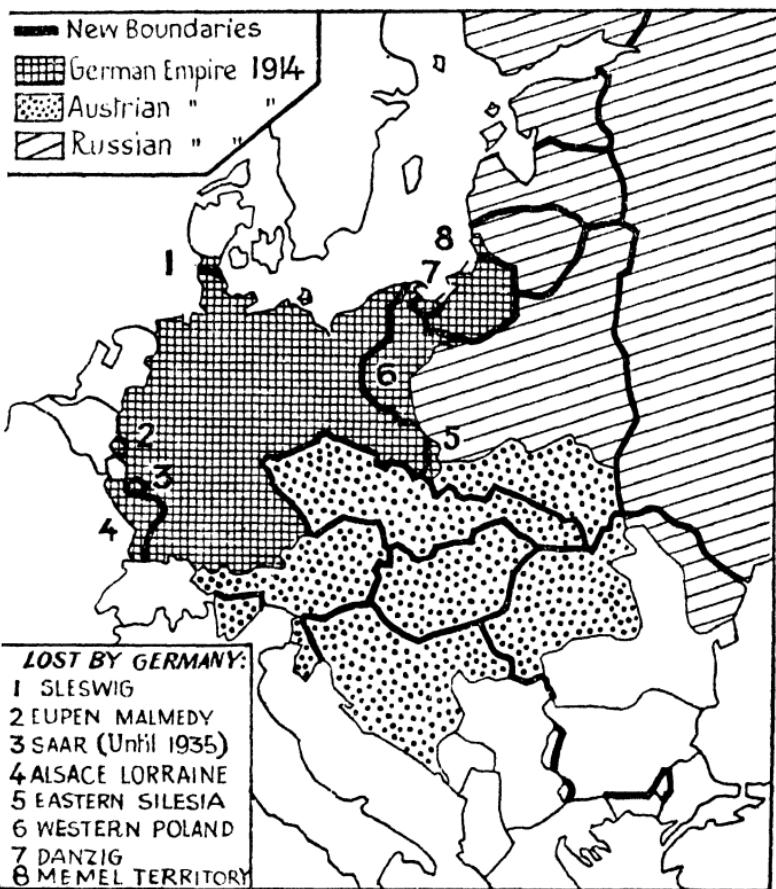
<sup>1</sup> *Germany Puts the Clock Back*, by Edgar A. Mowrer (Penguin Books, 6d.).

Of these, it is the adventurers and generals who rule Germany to-day and what worse could be said of the adventurers than that they make the generals seem the only hope of a sane future for Europe. The worst that can be said about the treaty is that it allowed to be destroyed for yet another generation any hope of freedom in Germany. To-day, when it is too late to defend freedom except beyond the German frontiers, there is general talk of treaty revision, and by this the ordinary man understands frontier revision. Every revision of the German frontiers must mean the extension to free men of a system which denies all freedom and all the best traditions of Western Europe. That the Germans of Czechoslovakia should want to submit to this system throws discredit on them alone, and in so far as their preference brings evil on others and extends the Nazi system in the world, there is no reason to give way to it. The abolition of slavery was not always advocated by the slaves themselves, nor were they the only beneficiaries. The masters also gained by the abolition of a system degrading to humanity.

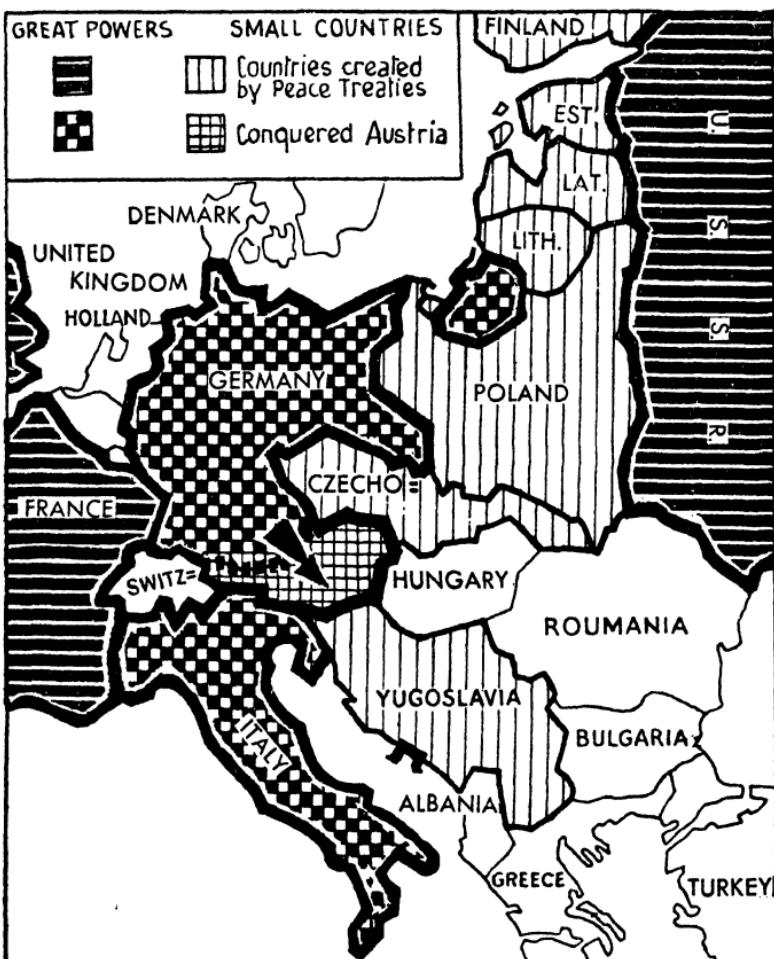
The Versailles territorial clauses do not, in any case, apply to Czechoslovakia since the frontier which divides Sudeten German from German to-day is the frontier which divided Sudeten German from German before the war. The decision to maintain this frontier intact was part of the treaty of St. Germain and did not apply to Germany. Hitler's denunciation of Versailles does not therefore affect the territorial settlement in South-Eastern Europe.

The territorial clauses of Versailles were an attempt to apply in practice the principle declared by Arthur Balfour in 1916. "The motto for the Allies," he wrote, "should be Germany for the Germans but only Germany."

This was the principle which was followed in drawing the territorial settlement in the West—Alsace-Lorraine and Eupen-Malmédy—and in the East, Poland and



7. THE BREAK-UP OF THE EUROPEAN IMPERIAL SYSTEM, 1919



8. THE PEACE SETTLEMENT, 1919

Lithuania. In the East it was more difficult and the claims of Poland to an outlet to the sea and to recover the land which Germany had been busily Germanising, meant that large numbers of Germans were excluded from the German frontiers. In view of the friendly relations between Colonel Beck and Herr Hitler and the ten-year pact which Poland signed with Germany in 1934, this would appear a matter for purely bi-lateral negotiation.

The territorial settlement of the Central European problem does not concern Germany directly. It was not part of the punitive system erected against Germany after the war, but was an independent attempt to solve the Central European problem. It must be admitted that it has worked well. For nearly twenty years there has been no armed conflict in that part of the world, which, before the war, was regarded as the witches' cauldron of Europe.

The most important result of the war, a result recognised and guaranteed in the Peace Treaties of St. Germain and Trianon, was the introduction into the relations between nations of the rights won by the liberal revolution.

Three Empires fell in the Great War—the Austrian, the Russian and the Turkish, and with them fell their dynasties and their aristocracies. The new settlement was based not only on a political but on a social revolution; and a young and vigorous world grew up in the place of the effete Empires. Revolution in Turkey and Russia not only ended their foreign domination but created new systems of government within their frontiers. The Turks receded further south, the Russians further north, and the Germans further west; and national independence for a generation was threatened by neither Turk nor Russian nor German. The essential result of an Allied victory was the creation of a "zone of small nations" from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Sea. This was the moral basis of the treaty, the victory

or democracy over imperialism and it was the strongest guarantee of future peace—a guarantee because of the satisfaction of the peoples involved: a guarantee because it established a European balance and, for twenty years saved Europe from the ever-recurring danger of domination and dictation by a single power. The territorial decisions of 1918–19, the exclusion of Germany and Russia and the handing over of the Central European zone to the small nations which inhabit it, have brought remarkable peace to this part of the world. One has only to compare the second twenty years of this century with the first. In the first twenty years there were three wars in the Balkans and several crises which made war seem imminent. Now the relations to each other of the Balkan States is an object lesson for the whole of Europe. The weak combine against the strong. Just settlements are upheld by combined effort and no nation need profoundly fear its neighbour. The only danger comes, as it has always come, from the rivalry of great powers whose lands lie outside the Balkans: it comes from the resurgence of a vast military power whose aim is to dictate the law of Europe and whose first attempt is inevitably directed against this guarantee of a balanced peace set up by the treaty.

If the motto of the treaty was “Germany for the Germans but only Germany,” the same applied to the Russians. The simultaneous defeat of these two powers prevented for a generation their penetration and domination of the country which lay between them. This was the opportunity of the small nations and in one generation more has been done to establish a balance based on the rights of liberty and equality in this part of the world than at any other time in European history.

The serious drawback, however, was that though every nation achieved independence, every nation could not be united, and large national minorities were left under foreign rule.

The intermingling of races in Eastern Europe made a satisfactory settlement of the new frontiers a very difficult and painful task for the peacemakers. The principle on which they tried to act was the principle of self-determination and the right of coherent national groups to independence. But nowhere was it possible to draw absolutely clean frontiers and the self-determination of some people inevitably meant the sacrifice of the self-determination of others. It was for this reason that resort was had to the minority treaties. For the first time, the proper treatment of minorities by Governments was not only laid down but guaranteed by an international body that comprised all the nations of the world who chose to belong. The smaller nations were given sovereignty over themselves, but their sovereignty over their national minorities was limited to their proper use of it. A valuable precedent was made but it was too often ignored or abused in practice, and national suffering has not been diminished by fortunes being reversed and the minorities being not the Slav races of the old Empire, but the dominating Magyars and Austrians.<sup>1</sup>

"Yet there has surely seldom or never been constructed a peace of more idealistic character," wrote Mr. Gathorne Hardy and in quoting him, Professor Seton Watson adds, "it rests upon a foundation of far-reaching political theory which is not affected even by grave imperfections of detail."

The principle underlying the territorial settlement in South Eastern Europe was the right of small nations to independent existence, to freedom and equality, and the right of all national groups and individuals to a certain standard of treatment internationally guaranteed. In an age of nationalism, these are the only principles which can give peace and a minimum of discontent

<sup>1</sup> There are 745,000 (this is Seton Watson's figure, the official Czech figures give 692,000) in Czechoslovakia, 1,463,000 in Roumania and 467,000 in Yugoslavia. In Czechoslovakia there are 3,232,000 Austrians (Sudeten Germans).

to the nations concerned. They are also the only principles which can give security to the small nations and it was very largely for this security that the war was fought. "What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves," said President Wilson on January 8th, 1918. "It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own free life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world, as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to ourselves."

This is the underlying principle of the League of Nations—a common desire of all countries to have their independence and integrity respected. The League was the first democratic international arrangement—it gave as much right to the small nations as to the large and should have secured for them, as for the Great Powers, the justice which they demanded. This democracy has since been decried, and many critics see in the approximation to equality between the smaller and greater nations the cause of the League's weakness. In fact, it is the Great Powers who have betrayed the League and who have decried the power of the small nations. And they have done so because if the small nations had been properly organised under a strong leadership, they could have thwarted the aggressive designs of the Imperialist powers. If we forsake the League, there is nothing to fall back upon but the balance of power between the larger nations. It is only the large nations to whom war can be an instrument of national aggrandisement. It is they who endanger the peace of the world. The designs of the small powers are defensive and peaceful and their influence has proved its virtue. A return to the old system is a change for the worse. War and the threat of war have again

become the instruments of policy. The League of Nations is despised by Hitler for the reason for which, erroneously, so far as the successors of Bismarck were concerned, he condemned the pre-war Austro-German alliance—its aim was the maintenance of peace. The devotion to the League of the small nations shows the simultaneous growth of nationalism and internationalism.

The territorial clauses of the treaties of St. Germain and Trianon provided a new solution for the problem of Central Europe—organisation of the basis on the small sovereign State. The League of Nations outlined the general principles which were to govern the relations of States to each other. The regional pacts into which these States entered were the practical applications of the principles of the League.

**“The High Contracting Parties**

In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security,  
by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war,  
by the prescription of open, just and honourable  
relations between nations,  
by the firm establishment of the understandings of  
international law as the actual rule of conduct among  
Government by the maintenance of justice and a  
scrupulous respect of treaty obligations in the dealings  
of organised peoples with each other.

Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.”

There were only two final solutions of the Central European problem, only two possible means of ending the incessant and bloody rivalry of the Great Powers, Germany, Russia and Italy, and of making a lasting peace :

(1) was to establish the lasting hegemony of one or other of these three powers and to crush the other two, as well as the small nations who live in this zone.

(2) was to establish the independence of the small powers on so sure a basis that these nations could, by their own efforts and with the support of the non-imperialist [in this part of the world] Western Powers prevent the Great Powers from fighting out their imperialist battles in Central Europe.

The solution chosen was the second and its motive was two-fold. From the point of view of the small states, it was a national liberation; from the point of view of the Allies, it was the creation of a new balance of power.

At the end of the nineteenth Century, the leadership of Europe had passed from France to Germany. The war of 1914-18 did not reverse that decision. The defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary was secured only by a world-wide coalition. The main purpose of the Peace Treaties was to re-establish a proper balance in Europe.

There was only one possible means of doing this. This was in Central Europe. If the leadership of Europe had passed from France to Germany, nothing we could do, short of the complete destruction of Germany, could win that leadership back. Germany was biologically stronger than France. Her population was absolutely bigger and the German birth-rate was higher than that of the French. The number and capacity of her population was greater and even if they had been defeated and were for the moment crushed, nothing but the most ruthless and ghastly slaughter could guarantee that they would remain permanently so. Even the centuries of foreign domination which the Czechs had suffered under had not prevented their resurrection.

The Europe of 1919, like the Europe of 1824, needed to call in a new world to redress the balance of the old. In Central Europe this new world was not even waiting to be called. From the ashes of the fallen Empires had arisen young and vigorous States. On the shores of the Baltic, liberated from the Russian Empire of the Tsars, arose Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Poland,

which, more than a century previously, had been partitioned between Germany, Austria and Russia, was united and independent again. Czechoslovakia, which was made up of the historic lands of mediæval Bohemia together with the Slav districts which had been under Hungarian rule, was established afresh. The Roumanians were united within one frontier; the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs were united to form the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Balkan peoples were freed from the fear either of Russian or Turkish imperialism. Between the shores of the Baltic and the shores of the Aegean, a new world was called into existence. It was a world resting on the idea of the national state and the equal rights of all nations, large and small.

It was one of Clemenceau's advisers—Captain Bucher—who immediately saw the significance for France of this vigorous new world which had been called into existence in Central Europe and was based on the ideas of the French Revolution. "Only the liberating and democratic ideas of the West," he said, "if cultivated in Central Europe can break the advance of Germanism and prevent the latter from dictating to the Continent."

For fifteen years Germany herself tried to change the meaning of "Germanism" which the other European peoples find so inimicable to their ideas of freedom. This attempt failed and to-day "Germanism" is associated with "Nazism" and the maintenance of the balance set up in 1919 to prevent German domination has become a matter of life and death against the Godless tyranny of Nazism.

In 1919 a new balance was established in Europe. The essence of this balance lay in the independence of the Central European nations from foreign control; the guarantee of this independence was the active interest of the Western Powers and the system of collective security. The States themselves were, at their inception, too weak and divided to be able to protect with their own powers alone their independence from foreign

interference. Only a federation could have done this and the small nations were too pleased with their new-born sovereignty to sacrifice it so soon to the needs of mutual defence. For twenty years there was no serious interference with this system. The imperialist powers who had regarded this region as their sphere of interest were too weak to embark on new schemes of interference and domination.

To-day this epoch is at an end. Germany has failed to interpret her mission in the world as anything else than crude physical domination. The Germany of the Nazis has a new scheme for Central Europe which is based on the supremacy of the German "race" and its right to dominate the "inferior" races of Central Europe. Nazi Germany aims simultaneously at upsetting the balance of Europe and at destroying the democratic ideas for which the last war was fought.

Czechoslovakia is the pivot on which the post-war balance turns and is also the noblest example of a free State on the eastern border of Germany. Therefore Hitler aims at the destruction of Czechoslovakia.

The rise of national dictators and the crisis of domestic democracy within the borders of the Fascist States, has not yet destroyed the democracy of nations. The danger is acute. Hitler plans German domination of the small nations of Central Europe; Mr. Chamberlain cannot be absolved from harbouring thoughts of a Four-Power coercion of Europe. But the smaller nations of Central Europe, led by Czechoslovakia, still possess "that public courage which is nourished by the love of independence, the sense of national honour, the presence of danger and the habit of command."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FRONTIERS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Czechoslovakia was the pivot of the post-war settlement. On the independence and territorial integrity of that country the post-war settlement depends. To-day, both are challenged. The Sudeten German Nazis have outlined a programme which they call their "minimum demands" and which is nothing more nor less than subjugation of Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany. If the Czechs refuse, and refuse they must while they care for political independence, the Nazis threaten to break up the whole country territorially.

"We shall press for the holding of a plebiscite. . . . The question put to the Sudetens under these circumstances would be: Do you want to be a citizen of Czechoslovakia or Germany?" (Henlein in an interview with the *Daily Mail*, May 26th, 1938). If this is not accepted, said Henlein, the German Government may be forced to take "direct action to bring the Sudeten Germans within the frontiers of the Reich." In other words, Konrad Henlein threatened his own Czechoslovak Government with war started by, and in the interests of, a foreign Power.

In these circumstances, it is well to examine the principles which guided the Allies in drawing up the present frontiers of Czechoslovakia and to decide whether the tone of voice used by a Nazi politician is a stronger argument in favour of other frontiers than the careful consideration of the Allied experts in 1919.

The Peace Conference opened in Paris on January 18th, 1919. The two leaders of the Czechoslovak delegation were Dr. Kramář, the Prime Minister, and

Dr. Beneš, the Foreign Minister. Their efforts were directed towards drawing as widely as possible the frontiers of the new State, and obtaining the best possible economic and financial terms. In the latter, they were disappointed. As an Allied Power they had hoped to be given a share in reparations: the Allies, on the other hand, expected them, as part of the territory of the Central Powers, to pay out rather than to receive. A compromise was reached by which Czechoslovakia paid a "liberation tax" of 750 million gold francs and took over part of the Austro-Hungarian war debt. The Czechs themselves, as a gesture of friendship towards Germany, voluntarily renounced their right to confiscate German property on Czechoslovak soil.

On the other hand the Czechs obtained a satisfactory settlement of their frontier claims. In his Memoirs, Dr. Beneš outlined eight Czech demands to the Peace Conference:—

1. The three historic lands of the Bohemian Crown, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.
2. The maintenance of their former frontiers with slight changes to the advantage of Czechoslovakia.
3. The incorporation of Slovakia.
4. The incorporation of sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.
5. The creation of a corridor connecting Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.
6. The internationalisation of certain rivers.
7. Protection for the Czech minority in Vienna.
8. Assistance for the Slav minority in Germany.  
(Wends.)

5, 7 and 8 were not seriously considered by the Peace Conference. As far as the remaining five points were concerned, Czechoslovakia was more or less satisfied. Apart from the general decision concerning the internationalisation of rivers, Czechoslovakia made a separate bi-lateral treaty with Germany which guaranteed Czech access to the sea via the Elbe and the port of Hamburg. Points 3 and 4 were accepted in principle,

though in detail, since it was a matter not of maintaining an old frontier but of drawing a new one, there were many difficulties. Points 1 and 2 were accepted.

Dr. Beneš appeared before the Council of Ten on February 5th, 1919, and explained the Czech demands in a three and a half hour speech. ("Mais il a été d'une longueur, votre Beneš." was Clemenceau's comment to Kramář.) A Commission was then appointed to examine these demands in detail. Except for the Hultschiner Ländchen, the whole territory which now forms Czechoslovakia formerly belonged to Austria-Hungary. Germany had no claims on the territory at all. It had at no time belonged to Germany, and the German-speaking inhabitants, as we have seen, were immigrants and colonists who had come of their own free will to Bohemia centuries before. Before the war they were not Germans but Austrians; and their incorporation within Czechoslovakia was contested not by Germany but by Austria. The German Government, as we have seen, refused to have anything to do with the demand of the Sudeten Germans for self-determination, and strongly advised them to accept their incorporation within the Czechoslovak Republic.

The question before the Peace Conference was not whether or not Czechoslovakia should exist, but how far its frontiers should extend. In the heart of Central Europe, a small independent Slav State was already re-constituted. Its rebirth was due entirely to its own efforts; long before its frontiers were actually drawn in detail, the Czechs and the Slovaks had established Government administration over the districts where they lived. The Peace Conference was called upon to solve the problems which concerned those areas in which not only Czechs and Slovaks were living, but also Hungarians, Poles and Germans.

Three main principles inspired the Allies in drawing up the frontiers of Central Europe.

1. *The Principle of Self-determination.* This principle

was proclaimed by President Wilson while the war was still in progress and it raised fantastic hopes in the hearts of every small national minority in Central and South Eastern Europe, and misled the Germans. These hopes were bound to be disappointed since it was impossible to apply the principle universally. In every part of the world, nation is intermixed with nation, race with race, small minorities enclosed within big majorities, and the limitations which even President Wilson put upon it were considerable.

"That all well-defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be given them, without introducing new, or perpetuating old elements of discord or antagonism that would be likely in time to break up the peace of Europe and consequently the peace of the world."

What unit was to be taken? In cases where the self-determination of certain people—for instance the Sudeten Germans—conflicted with others—the Czechs—whose rights were the greater?

It is interesting to read Mr. Lansing, the American Secretary of State's contemporary criticism of President Wilson's principle. He wrote in his diary of December 20th:

"The more I think about President Wilson's declaration as to the rights of 'self-determination', the more convinced I am of the danger of putting such ideas into the minds of certain races. It is bound to be the basis of impossible demands on the Peace Congress, and create trouble in many lands.

"What effect will it have on the Irish, the Indians, the Egyptians, and the nationalists among the Boers? Will it not breed discontent, disorder and rebellion? Will not the Mohammedans of Syria and Palestine and possibly of Morocco and Tripoli rely upon it? How can it be harmonised with Zionism, to which the President is practically committed?

"The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite. It

will raise hopes that can never be realised. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end it is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an idealist who failed to realise the danger until too late to check those who put the principle into force. What calamity the phrase was ever uttered ! What misery it will cause !”

and Mr. Lansing adds in his book published in 1921:

“Since the foregoing notes were written the impracticability of the universal or even of the general application of the principle has been fully demonstrated.”

Even President Wilson himself confessed before the United States Senate, “When I gave utterance to these words (that all nations had a right to self-determination) I said them without the knowledge that nationalities existed which are coming to us day after day.”

The principle of self-determination was invoked in favour of the Czechs and Slovaks. It was ignored in the case of the Sudeten Germans and Hungarians who lived on and within their borders, because it applied to whole nations rather than to minorities. The whole of the Czechoslovak nation lived under foreign rule, only a part of the German and Hungarian nations. These had, as the guarantees of their national existence, Germany and Hungary. Had self-determination been granted to the Germans and Hungarians it would have had to have been denied to the Czechs and Slovaks. Since, of all the nationalities who live in this part, the Czechs and Slovaks alone had no State of their own, their claim to self-determination was obviously the strongest.

The collapse of Czechoslovakia would mean national annihilation for the Czechs and Slovaks.

Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the principle of self-determination was modified into the principle of the right of small nations to independent existence, the right of national minorities to just treatment by the Government which ruled them. This was the principle

which was held to justify the recognition of Czechoslovakia and the principle which claims continued support for that country to-day.

Apart from the self-contradiction of this principle, i.e., the conflict of two units both demanding self-determination in circumstances which mean that one or other claim must be subordinated, this principle was also contradicted by other principles which had to guide the statesmen in Paris. These principles were:

2. *The viability of States in time of peace.*
3. *Their possibility of self-defence in time of war.*

Principle 1.—the right of small nations to freedom and equality—was the principle which led the Peace Conference to ratify the independence of Czechoslovakia. Principles 2 and 3 were the principles which they followed in drawing up the frontiers of the new State.

To-day on the pretext of self-determination, the Sudeten German Nazis demand a “settlement” which they know will not only make the military defence of Czechoslovakia impossible at the exact moment at which Nazi Germany appears to be preparing war against the whole continent and in particular against the Czechs themselves; but they are also demanding a settlement which they know will make the continued existence of Czechoslovakia, in the long run, impossible. The Nazis demand that the Czechoslovak Republic, the last democracy in Central Europe, be organised as a free and liberal State in the interior, a Nazi and totalitarian State on the fringes.

This is an abuse of the principle of self-determination which fulfils Lansing's worst fear. It would, if realised, not only cost thousand of lives—the lives of the last free Germans in what was the Austrian Empire—but it will take freedom from a whole people. Even Lansing cannot have imagined that the principle uttered by the idealist, President Wilson, would one day be used against the democrats to make a Nazi holiday.

## CHAPTER VIII

### POLITICS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

TO-DAY Czechoslovakia is threatened for three reasons. In the first place because she is the keystone in the European balance of power. Secondly, because she contains within her frontiers a German speaking minority which is, for the moment, overwhelmingly Nazi. Thirdly because she is a free and democratic country, and therefore, by her example, a constant danger to the dictatorial system established in Germany.

The historic State of Bohemia was revived, and with it, its democratic traditions. The Czechs, who had long fought for freedom, assumed without modern experience, the task of establishing a democratic system. This system had to apply not only to themselves but to the backward eastern provinces—Slovakia and the even more primitive Ruthenia; it had to apply to the national minorities which were hostile to the State. The problem which faced the Czechs was to create a political system which would command the allegiance of all sections of the population, progressive and backward, Czech and German, Slovak and Hungarian.

The State which the Czechs intended and to a large extent realised, was outlined in the Washington Declaration of Independence in 1918.

“The Czechoslovak State (it runs) shall be a republic in constant endeavour for progress. It will guarantee complete freedom of conscience, religion and science, literature and art, speech, the press and the right of assembly and petition. The Church shall be separated from the State. Our democracy shall rest on universal suffrage; women shall be placed

on an equal footing with men, politically, socially and culturally, while the right of a minority shall be safeguarded by proportional representation. National minorities shall enjoy equal rights. The Government shall be parliamentary in form and shall recognise the principles of initiative and referendum. The standing army shall be replaced by a militia. The Czechoslovak nation will carry out far-reaching social and economic reforms. The large estates will be redeemed for home colonisation, and patents of nobility will be abolished. . . . On the basis of democracy, mankind will be organised. . . . We believe in democracy, we believe in liberty and liberty for ever more."

This is an ambitious declaration for any people to make, most of all for a people which had been treated as the servant class of an arrogant and lackadaisical Empire—a people which included such incompatible elements as the gypsies and long-curled Jews of Ruthenia, the temperamental peasants of Slovakia, the haughty Hungarians, the stubborn Czechs and the tough German miners of Northern Bohemia. Yet there are few unfulfilled hopes in it.

As far as the Czechs and, to a large extent, the Slovaks were concerned, Czechoslovakia became a real progressive democracy. If it was less democratic for the minorities; this was largely their own fault and due to their profession of anti-democratic views and sentiments. Czechoslovakia is the last remaining Parliamentary democracy east of Switzerland and its political system is as firmly established as any on the Continent. Parliament consists of two Houses, both elected; the membership of the Lower House is 300, and of the Upper House, 150. Every man and woman over 21 has a vote for the Lower House; above the age of 26 for the Upper. Candidates must be aged 30 and 45 respectively. Elections are held every seven years and voting is secret and obligatory. No drink is allowed to be sold during voting hours. Anybody who does

not "vote is fined, because democracy is considered to be not only a right but a duty, and every citizen is expected to acquaint himself with the issues at stake. The average Czech crossing-sweeper knows more about internal and foreign politics than the average English company director.

The electoral system is based on proportional representation, as in France. According to this system, parties present their lists all over the country and the votes which they gain in each constituency are added together and seats in Parliament are allotted according to the total number of votes in the country, and not, as in our system, according to the majority in each constituency. This puts enormous power into the hands of the parties, and one of the evils of Czech political life is the Party System. The party membership card plays far too important a part in securing a job, while the parties themselves are job-givers on a vast scale, not only in the Civil Service but in the banks, Trade Unions, industries and associations, which have grown up round each party. This is most serious where the Civil Service is concerned, for Ministries are handed on, in Government after Government, to the same party. Since protection and influence exist on an appreciable scale, and to a certain extent are regarded as the necessary accompaniment of party politics, Ministries are overwhelmingly staffed by officials from one party—for instance, the great majority of the high officials in the Ministry of the Interior are Agrarians.

The system of proportional representation has another disadvantage. It greatly increases the number of parties by giving representation to small minorities, which would be ignored in a two or three-party system. There may not, for instance, be very many shop-keepers in one village, but in the whole country there are, of course, a fair number, and so they have a "Small Traders Party" of their own. In all, there are over twenty significant parties. Czechs, Slovaks, Germans,

Hungarians, Poles, each have their own parties, and their own deputies in Parliament, and can vote for them even when they live in predominantly Czech districts.

Apart from the protection it gives to national minorities, the system, however, has other advantages. It means that no one party is ever strong enough to form a Government by itself. Therefore, even should, for instance, the Agrarian Party wish to impose its own policy upon the country, it can only do so if it has the support of several other parties. A vote of no confidence by the House of Deputies means the immediate fall of the Government. Since no one Party is strong enough to form a Government by itself, as in this country, Government in Czechoslovakia is Government by Coalition. The Prime Minister usually belongs to the strongest party in the country, and the other Ministries are divided among the parties according to their electoral strength. This means that the programme of each party is profoundly modified in practice and that the Government programme has to be a compromise between all the parties represented in it. Any party which feels that its programme is sufficiently like that of the Government may join it, though Ministries are allotted according to party strength. Between 1925 and 1938 there were first two and then three German parties in the Government. The Slovak Autonomist Party of Hlinka has also been in the Government. The Communists, the Poles and the Hungarians, in so far as the last two vote for national rather than for Czechoslovak parties have been consistently in opposition.

This system of Government by compromise is inevitably slow and necessarily moderate. Since all decisions in the Cabinet are taken by unanimous rather than by majority vote, every measure has to be one which is more or less pleasing to Socialists, Catholics, town workers and farmers as well as Czechs, Slovaks, and Germans. This means that each party is inevitably dissatisfied, but also that the country as a whole gets more or less what

it wants with the minimum of upheaval and the minimum danger of sudden changes.

There have been twelve Governments in all since the foundation of the Republic, and the political complexion of each has been more or less similar. For the first few years it was more to the Left than it was later, and to-day the discredit which political violence has elsewhere put on the parties of the Right, has inclined the Government more to the Centre.

Five main parties make up the Czechoslovak Government to-day and with certain minor alterations have made all the Governments since the war. The largest party is the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party which has 45 deputies in the House, of whom some 20 are Slovaks. The Prime Minister, Dr. Hodža, a Slovak, belongs to this party, so also does Machnik, the War Minister, Černy, the Minister of the Interior, and Zadina, the Minister for Agriculture. This party was originally a predominantly agricultural party, and represented the huge class of peasant proprietors which came into existence after the war. To-day, however, owing to the growth of "agricultural industries," of State monopolies and banks, of semi-national industries like armaments, and huge cartels in all fields, it chiefly represents the interests of the capitalist and owning classes. A conflict arises, therefore, within the party between the popular and the capitalist interests, and, with the exception of the Slovaks, it is the latter which have the upper hand. The party has, to a large extent, taken the place of the Kramář Party, and to-day it is strongly anti-Socialist and even in a large measure, opposed to the Trade Unions and the very moderate restrictions placed by the State on private enterprise. It is this dislike of restriction on private profit, or insistence on working-class rights, which makes this party inclined at times to sympathise with Henlein and with the Nazis in Germany. Both the Sudeten German and the Reich German Nazis, under cover of class

solidarity, have taken from the workers their free institutions, and now that the worker is no longer protected, real wages are falling and hours of work rising in every part of Germany. This is naturally a temptation to Czech employers, but, on the other hand, since the interests of the Agrarian Party are still served by agricultural protection, sympathy with the Henlein industrialists is necessarily limited. In the past it was the Czech Agrarian Party which did more than anyone else to ruin Sudeten German industry by its policy of agricultural protection.

The other Right-Wing party in the Government is the National Union, the old party of Kramář (the first Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia and delegate, as we have seen, to the Peace Conference) which fought the 1935 elections in company with Stříbený, the renegade Socialist turned Fascist. This party has 13 seats in the House of Deputies and joined the Government in 1938 after the collapse of the German Agrarian and Catholic parties, which weakened the Government by eleven seats. The Minister of this Party is M. Ježek.

The two Centre Parties in the Government are the Czechoslovak Populist (the Catholic Party), and, slightly more to the Left, the National Socialist Party. The Czech Populist (Catholic) Party is the fourth strongest Government Party and has 22 seats in the House of Deputies. Its leader is Monsignor Šrámek, a man of wide liberal views and strong personality, and a loyal co-operator of Dr. Beneš. Msg. Šrámek has rendered a great service to his country and to his faith by guiding the Catholic influence in Czechoslovakia in a liberal spirit. At one time, shortly after the foundation of the Republic, there was a large exodus of the Czechs ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  million) from the Roman Catholic Church. This was largely due to political and, above all, nationalist reasons, since Catholicism was associated with the Austrian régime. In the first years of the Republic, therefore, there were fairly serious religious conflicts within the country, which led to acute tension between the Vatican

and the Czechoslovak Government when John Huss, who had been burnt at the stake as a heretic, was honoured as a national hero.

The Catholic influence in Czechoslovakia is very important. There were over 10 million Roman Catholics in the country in 1921, that is, more than two-thirds of the population. To-day this figure is probably even higher.

But anti-clericalism among the Czechs soon subsided and to-day there is no religious conflict in Czechoslovakia, but complete religious toleration, in every part of the country, which covers Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, several sorts of Protestants, the Czech Hussite Church, Jews, gypsies, free-thinkers and atheists. To-day, the Roman Catholic influence is the strongest in the country, and with the blessing of the Vatican it is strongly in support of Czechoslovak national independence.

The religious issue was in part responsible for difficulties which arose between the Czechs and Slovaks and which still arise to-day. Slovakia, as we have seen, was far less developed than the Czech provinces and after its liberation from Hungarian rule there was a serious shortage of men and women who could take the place of the Hungarian officials, teachers and priests. Czechs came there, therefore, after the war in large numbers. Many of these Czechs were either Protestants or free thinkers and offended the religious feelings of the Slovak peasantry. This was fomented by the Hungarian priests who remained, and to this day they are partly responsible for misunderstandings between Czechs and Slovaks. At first the Slovak Clerical (autonomist) Party, under Hlinka, and the Czech Clericals under Srámek, co-operated, but after a while this link with the Czechs was severed, and having worked for a short time with the Government, Hlinka retired into opposition. This opposition was partly political and partly personal. He was a Roman Catholic priest and exercised great influence over the quick and sensitive Slovaks. He had the personal magnetism and charm of a fanatic and the

same political aberrations. In pre-war Hungary he was a brave and devoted Slovak patriot, but he carried his early fighting spirit into the Czechoslovak State where other qualities were needed and he preferred "Slovak" to "Czechoslovak" patriotism. Hlinka died in August of this year and his place as leader of the Slovak Autonomist Party has been taken by Tiso, also a priest, and former Minister of Health. Tiso is leader of the more moderate wing of the party and is likely to prove more conciliatory than Hlinka.

Hlinka's intransigence was partly due to the mistakes made by the Czechs in offending the local and Catholic feelings of the Slovaks, partly, his enemies say, to Hlinka's personal disappointment. His opposition took the form of a strong demand for Slovak autonomy and in June, 1938, he published the text of an Autonomy Bill. This Bill demanded self-government for Slovakia and, though it left foreign affairs, defence and finance in the hands of the Prague Government, claimed a legislative diet for Slovakia, and the right of Slovak military recruits to be trained in their own province. This demand was enthusiastically received by Henlein (who was asking for much the same thing for himself) and by Germany and Poland. It is also whole-heartedly accepted by Hungary, who sees in regional autonomy the chance of disrupting the Czechoslovak State. This was certainly not Hlinka's aim, though his lieutenants were not altogether above suspicion. They are in closer touch with Poland and Hungary than it is honourable for political leaders to be.

The autonomy issue is not an issue between Czechs and Slovaks but between the Slovaks themselves. The Hlinka Party has a bare majority of the Slovak votes, the rest are for Czechoslovak Parties (chiefly Agrarians and Social Democrats) and are represented in the Government. Dr. Hodža, the Agrarian Prime Minister, and Dr. Dérer, the Social Democratic Minister of Justice, are both Slovaks. Hlinka based his demand on the famous Pittsburg Agreement which was drawn up

during the war by Czechs and Slovaks in America, and which outlined for Slovakia "her own administrative system, her own diet and her own courts." The autonomists claim that these were promises which were made and have been broken. The "centralists" maintain that they were not promises and committed nobody to support any future form of government. Dr. Dérer, in an excellent pamphlet, maintains that the Pittsburg Agreement is being slowly fulfilled and that only slow fulfilment was possible, owing to the backwardness of Slovakia. The Nationality Statute which the Government drew up in the summer of 1938 constituted a wide measure of decentralisation for all the provinces of the Republic. The Slovak Autonomist Party is not *sui generis* in opposition, and during the early months of 1938 there was serious talk of it again entering the Government.

The Left Wing of the Government is made up of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, and the Czechoslovak and German Social Democrat Parties. Since March, 1938, the last named has no longer been in the Government, for reasons which we will deal with in a later chapter, but it co-operates closely with the Czech brother party.

The Czechoslovak Social Democrat Party is the second largest Government party in the State. It is an old party which dates back to the pre-war régime. In the early years of the Republic it was the strongest party, and obtained 74 seats in the 1920 elections. The secession of the Left Wing to the Third International at the end of that year split the whole Party and it has never regained its former strength. At first, the Communist Wing was the stronger, but to-day the Social Democrats hold 38 seats to the Communist Party's 30, and are supported by a strong Trade Union movement. The Ministers of this Party are Rudolf Bechyně, the Minister of Railways and Deputy Prime Minister, Jaroslav Nečas, the Minister of Social Welfare, and Dr. Dérer, the Minister of Justice.

The other Socialist Party in the Government is the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, which has nothing whatever in common with Nazi principles. It is more Nationalist and less Marxist than the Social Democratic Party, and its voting power is to be found less among the general electorate than among the lower officials, artisans and intellectuals. This Party has 28 seats in the House and two Ministers in the Government, Dr. Emil Franke, the Minister of Education, and Alois Tučny, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. It has, however, an influence beyond its numerical strength, partly because of its excellent newspapers, the *Česke Slovo* and the *Lidové Noviny*, partly because of its influence on foreign policy. Dr. Beneš, when he was Foreign Minister from 1919-35, was a member of this Party, and this Party for the most part still very strongly supports his ideas.

In the Municipal and County Council elections which were held in May and June, 1938, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party increased its strength. This was very largely due to the issue of foreign policy which, thanks to Germany's violent press campaign against the Republic and the serious disturbances which were being caused by the Henlein Party, dominated the elections. Those elections showed a very decided strengthening of the Left—the Czech National Socialists and the Communists;—and a wholesale defeat of the extreme Right—the Fascists and the National Union. Even the Agrarians scarcely maintained their position, and the Clerical Party (Populists), against whom all their propaganda had been directed, maintained and even strengthened their position.

These elections were very important from the point of view of a possible alternative and pro-Fascist Government, such as a coalition between the Czech Agrarians (*Hodža*), Slovak Catholics (*Hlinka*) and German Nazis (*Henlein*)—"the three H's." It was obvious after the elections that this could not be brought about consti-

tutionally, and would not command a Parliamentary majority.

The present Government majority is as follows:—

Agrarian	45	
Social Democrats	38	<i>Conditional supporters</i>
National Socialists	28	German Social Democrats 11
Czech Clericals	22	Communists 30
National Union	13	
Small Traders	17	
	—	—
	163	41

The “Three H’s Government” would only increase the present majority by 55, Henlein; and 22, Hlinka; and this increase of 77 would be immediately counterbalanced by the resignation of the four Socialist Parties, with a Parliamentary following of 107. Similarly, the addition of 30 certain Communist votes would lose the Government, at least the Agrarian Party and the National Union (58 votes), if not more. And it would gain little for the Government (only 30 votes), since in matters of vital defence the Communist Party already co-operates loyally with the Government.

It is more than probable that to-day a move to form semi-Fascist Government would be countered by the Socialist Parties with a demand for new elections—and in those, according to all the electoral signs, the Right would again decrease its membership. Therefore the Agrarian Party would risk even its present strength if it tried to manœuvre for an alternative Right-Wing Government.

There is, however, always the danger of Government by decree. In Germany and in Austria, dictatorship was installed by the suspension of a Parliamentary Government, and in a crisis, more often than not, resort is had to extra-Parliamentary powers.

One of the essential differences between Germany and Czechoslovakia, between Czechoslovakia and

Russia, is the difference in personalities. In Czechoslovakia there is no Hitler and no Lenin, and, above all, no Hindenburg. Instead of the old and reactionary last President of the Weimar Republic, Czechoslovakia has a young and vigorous President, Dr. Beneš. Moreover, if dictatorship ever became necessary, it would be run by the moderate and professional elements in the Army, as we shall see later.

But dictatorship and revolution are unknown in Czechoslovakia. Throughout its history, Czechoslovakia has shown a remarkable stability and steadiness of purpose. It has escaped both the post-war Socialist revolutions and the post-crisis Fascist tyrannies. It is the only Central European country which has done so. Germany, Austria and Hungary have all been through both Left-Wing and Right-Wing revolutions and their attitude to Czechoslovakia alters with their own experience. Czechoslovakia has remained practically unchanged. Yet in 1928 German Socialists passing through Prague on the shortest route between Red Berlin and Red Vienna despised the "bourgeois Republic." In 1938, Germans, following the same route from Nazi Berlin to Nazi Vienna, regard Czechoslovakia as the hot-bed of Bolshevism. In fact the political complexion of Czechoslovakia has hardly changed in twenty years. This is due to the character of the Czechs, their talent for orderly Government, but chiefly to the well-balanced social and economic system.

As we have already seen, it is not in the nature of the Czechs to be violent or revolutionary, and at the turning-point in their history they found leaders who were opposed to revolution by violence. To Masaryk, revolution was the last resort. "Revolution is justified in self-defence," he wrote in the *Making of a State*, "for revolution is permissible when, as during the World War, administrative and political chaos threaten. . . . We shall overcome the revolutionary spirit as we overcame militarism. Bloodshed is an evil inheritance of the past."

We desire a State, a Europe and a Mankind without war and without revolution. In a true democracy, war and revolution will be obsolete and unnecessary."

Socialist revolution in Czechoslovakia was unnecessary. From the first the Czechs had a very healthy social system, differences in income were slight and there were no rigid class divisions. The Bohemian aristocracy was more Austrian than Czech in feeling, and when the Czechs took over Government, this class lost what political influence it had possessed. On the Czechoslovak Government it has no influence whatsoever. On foreign diplomats resident in Prague, and who spend their week-ends in the houses of these people, their influence is wholly deleterious to their own country and to the cause of Liberalism in general. It was not only interest in blood sports but in Sudeten Nazis which took Lord Runciman to these houses at his week-ends.

Even the bourgeoisie in pre-war Bohemia and Slovakia was largely either Austrian, Hungarian, German or Jewish and the means of production, industrial and landed, was mostly in their hands. To a large extent the class division coincided with the national division; where it failed to do so, the feeling of national solidarity was so strong that class issues seldom transcended the barriers of nationality. When the class division and the national division coincided, it gave a strong impetus to social reform; when it differed, it put a brake on extreme social and economic demands.

The Socialist parties, for instance, have always been divided nationally. The Social Democratic Party under Seliger was as nationalist as the Right-Wing German parties, and felt it had more in common with these parties than it had with the Czech Social Democratic Party. Therefore no class front could be built, and the Communist Party which tried to build it failed to achieve a strong influence, just because it had preferred social to national issues.

The Communist leader in Czechoslovakia was Bohumil Šmeral, the least nationalist of all the pre-war Czech political leaders. Up to the last he opposed the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic and would have preferred to solve conflicts with Austria-Hungary on a social rather than national basis. After the State was founded, he continued to oppose, in the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, the nationalist tendencies of the Czechs and of the minorities alike, and demanded a policy based on social rather than on national reform. This marked him out as a leader of a Socialist party which would unite all the nationalities. But both the Czech and especially the German Social Democrat Parties were violently nationalist. Under his leadership, in 1920, the Left Wing of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party split off, bringing the Socialist-Agrarian Coalition Government under the premiership of Tusar, down with it, and Šmeral founded the Communist Party.

The Communist Party is the one Czechoslovak party which unites all the nationalities of the Republic. Realising the strength of nationalist feeling, Šmeral at first advocated a transition period in which the separate organisations would be maintained, and be united in a super-national committee. By May, 1921, however, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Germans, Hungarians, had been united irrespective of nationality and the Communist Party became affiliated to the Third International.

It is significant, though the Czechoslovak Communist Party has always been numerically strong and to-day represents 10 per cent of the House of Deputies, that it has not played an important part in the Czechoslovak Republic, and has always been in opposition. This is partly due to its own shortcomings, to its poor leadership and confusing changes in tactics and policy, but chiefly to the fact that it was not a national party and did not appeal to the national feelings of any of the nationalities. Up till 1935 the Communist Party even

opposed the Czechoslovak State and the national interests of the country. To-day, though still in Parliamentary opposition, the Party has come out very strongly for the foreign policy and defence policy of the State. It is again increasing in strength, especially in the big towns where national rather than local issues are decisive, for it is associated closely with the Czech-Soviet alliance which is to-day the strongest guarantee of Czechoslovak independence. The increasing patriotism of the Russian Communists is beneficial rather than deleterious in its effects, since it brings out the common Slav element in the two parties. The Czechoslovak Communist Party, although it includes a fairly large proportion of Germans and Hungarians, is mostly Slav, and the leadership is Czech and Slovak. Its chief strength is in the mining districts, and also in the more eastern and backward parts of the Republic. It also, as in this country, has sympathisers among writers and intellectuals, but at present its influence over policy is slight. If the international situation deteriorates and Nazi Germany is allowed to become so aggressive that open conflict breaks out, the influence of the Party will inevitably be strengthened.

In the early years of the Republic, however, the ranks of the reformers were reduced by reform. In 1919-20 Czechoslovakia was ruled by a Red-Green Coalition of the Social Democrats and Agrarians, and during the next few years by a Left-Wing Cabinet of officials. As early as 1918 the 8-hour day was passed for the whole Republic; to this were added measures which extended holidays with pay to a large number of professions, and the Ghent System of unemployment insurance which should have both strengthened the trade unions and the position of the unemployed. The position of the workers was also strengthened by Works Committees which were set up in all the factories and by Labour Courts in most of the big towns, whose duty it was to give a fair hearing to both parties in all

labour disputes. With further measures of this kind the Republic started on its course with a healthy social system and sound laws for the protection of the workers, which added very considerably to the stability of the country.

The most dangerous elements from the point of view of social stability came not from the town workers but from the land-hungry peasants, especially of Eastern Slovakia.

The most important measure therefore which was passed was the Land Reform. This measure told most heavily against the Austrians and Hungarians who were the biggest landowners and it excited violent and national opposition; by far its most important aspect, however, was that it redistributed one-third of the land of the Republic and founded on the soil a strong class of peasant proprietors. Like a similar measure which was passed in France during the French revolution, it created a class which is an essential element in maintaining the stability of the country. To-day over 5 million of the 15 million inhabitants of Czechoslovakia are employed in agriculture (i.e. 1,672,000 actively engaged). Only 31,000 farms exceed 100 acres and the immense majority of the farms are under 25 acres. This measure was vitally important, and without it the Republic would have had a far stormier history. Before the war the only remedy open to the landless peasant was to emigrate and between 1900 and 1913 it is estimated that 7.7 per cent of the entire population of Slovakia emigrated. From Bohemia alone close on 300,000 Czechs emigrated in those years. The pressure of these people would have become a serious problem after America closed her doors to immigrants, had land not been available for home colonisation.

The Land Reform, which had an important stabilising effect in so far as it created a large class with a vital stake in the country, also, as has already been noticed, had a sinister aspect. In the first place, the Land Reform led to much speculation in land and to the rapid enriching

of the less honest and disinterested of the politicians who were responsible for the practical application of the measure. In this way it created new vested interests and an unscrupulous bourgeoisie which, in many respects, was far worse than the feudal bourgeoisie which it displaced. Furthermore, the division of the land into small holdings necessitated the growth of cartels and huge monopolies which put immense economic power into the hands of a small number of men who in turn secured a commanding influence in the Agrarian Party.

The influence of the monopolies was exaggerated by the catastrophic fall in agricultural prices in 1929. One of the main products of Czechoslovakia was, for instance, sugar-beet, the "white gold of Bohemia." Before the slump Czechoslovakia consumed 32.6 per cent of her own sugar production and exported the rest. After the slump, the area under cultivation was reduced to two-thirds of its former size, internal consumption fell off by 10 per cent and exports by 50 per cent of the reduced production. Meanwhile, the price has been maintained at an abnormally high level and it is the peasant producers who have suffered. To-day huge vested interests have grown up round Czech agriculture, both through the monopolies and through the industries and banks which are associated with the Agrarian interest. One of the largest banks in Central Europe is the Agrarian Živnostenska Banka, which controls over 35 per cent of Czechoslovak industry. Dangerous influences are known to be at work; both in this bank and in the sugar and corn monopolies, highly placed people having Fascist and especially Nazi sympathies. Just as many Sudeten German industrialists hope to be compensated nationally and by the abolition of trade unions and labour regulations, for an economic union which would bring them into competition with the stronger German industries, so Czech monopoly interests could hope to benefit by a foreign political alliance which protected them from the Czech Left Wing.

This latent conflict between the small Liberal peasant proprietor and the big, reactionary monopoly interest issues in the political field as we have seen inside the Agrarian Party. This Party has a Right-Wing leadership and a Left-Wing basis, and the stresses and strains within the Party are on the increase, while the Party itself is losing to the Czechoslovak Populist (Catholic) Party and in some places to the Communist Party. It is undoubtedly still the strongest party in the Republic and, from the point of view of internal stability, the most dangerous. If Fascism came to Czechoslovakia it would come not through the negligible Fascist parties but through the Right-Wing Agrarians and the Nazi pressure on Prague.

Although in the present critical situation nothing can be excluded, it is probable that the Czech people would not allow the imposition of a Fascist régime and the attempt to impose it would provoke civil war. It is unlikely, however, that matters will come to this pass. We have seen the checks on a Socialist revolution—a well-balanced social system, far-reaching social reforms, national solidarity which prevents the formation of class fronts and an economic system well-adjusted between industry and agriculture. The checks on a Fascist revolution are in many ways the same.

The economic interests which would favour Fascist revolution are not yet sufficiently developed to force the issue. The Right-Wing Agrarian leaders must consider the demands of the peasants who keep them in power with their votes. The effective parliamentary system and the need for compromise in Government by coalition, are also important. There are two other vital factors: the President of the Republic and the Army.

The President of the Republic is elected for a period of seven years by both Houses of Parliament in joint session. His powers are considerably more than those of the British King and resemble those of the French President. It is he who chooses the Prime Minister and

he can do much to affect the subsequent choice of Ministers. His powers are personal rather than constitutional, and the Republic has been fortunate in having two of the most outstanding of post-war statesmen as its first Presidents. These were President Masaryk, for the first seventeen years of the Republic, and, since 1935, Dr. Beneš. Around these two a group of strong, liberal-minded men has been formed, and this influence, the influence of the "castle," is a decisive factor in the political development of Czechoslovakia. To-day Czechoslovakia might be in grave danger if a man less strong, determined and clear-sighted than Dr. Beneš was in power. Beneš is a fervent democrat and would play the part of Hindenburg only in extreme necessity. The strong man whom he appointed would not be a Hitler, but a man of his own outlook and calibre. While the normal political system of the country continues to function, this is an extreme solution for the present difficulties which it is not necessary to contemplate.

If Dr. Beneš was not President, the external and internal situations of the Republic would be far more grave. Its present gravity cannot be exaggerated, but this is not due to disintegration among the Czechs, but to the military danger of invasion by Germany and the internal danger of the Sudeten German Nazis. The essential element in Czechoslovak security to-day is, therefore, not Parliament nor the Parties, nor even a sound social system, but the Army.

Is the Army safe? The Czechoslovak Army, with the Spanish Republican Army, is the most democratic in the world. It has been trained by a French military mission and been brought up in the tradition of the legionaries—that is, it has been taught to regard its first duty as the defence of popular liberty. The Czechs were violently anti-militarist after the war, and demanded a militia, not an army. The military leaders struggled to build up an army under acute financial difficulties and strong political opposition.

Hitler changed all this. In 1931-32 the Czechs began to scent the direction of the wind and realise that their Army must be ready not only to defend freedom at home but freedom from foreign aggression. Since 1933, and above all since 1935, the Army has been built up to be the finest in South-Eastern Europe, the best equipped and the best disciplined. No complaint from the national minorities is ever heard. Its spirit is first-class and it is the one institution which succeeds in giving a sense of national purpose and solidarity above the quarrels of the various nationals in the State. The "castle" influence is very strong in the Army, but the only political role which the Army leaders would ever be ready to assume is that which is vital to the security and independence of the country. Only when this was threatened would the Czechoslovak Army intervene.

For this reason the manifesto, issued in August by the official organ of the Association of Army Officers during the negotiations between the Czechoslovak Government and the Sudeten German Nazis, was a very serious warning:

"Under no conditions must the authority of the State be divided, reduced or undermined—not through one single deed, not through one single word more.

"From this position there can be no retreat. In this position we will defend ourselves and die, but not give way, not one step, not one foot's breadth, not one hand's breadth."

The Nazis, who had hitherto had the field entirely to themselves in issuing heroic statements, vehemently protested. The Czechoslovak Government, out of deference largely to British opinion, banned further publication of the manifesto. It was in fact British pressure which was driving Czech public opinion to contemplate the possible necessity for a change of Government.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUDETEN GERMAN POLITICS

UP to 1936–37, little was heard of Czechoslovakia, and all that Mr. John Gunther could find to say of it as late as October, 1936, was that “local Czech politics pursue a smooth and inconspicuous course.” If Czechoslovakia has ceased to be marked by the rare advantage of furnishing very few materials for history, this is more due to the crimes, follies and misfortunes of others than of her own.

The Czechs, however, have all along had serious problems, and these are the ostensible though not the real cause of the present crisis. As somebody has said, if there had been no Sudeten German problem, it would have to have been invented for the Nazis. The real cause was publicly admitted in September, 1938, when Lord Runciman, having approved the Czech offer of a basis for negotiations, reported to be acceptable to the Sudeten Germans and Czechs, thought it necessary to despatch Henlein to Hitler. Without Hitler's approval, he thus admitted, no settlement can be reached. Hitler's approval is based not, as this proves, on the needs of the Sudeten Germans but on calculations of power politics. Will it increase Nazi Germany's capacity for successful war? Will it extend the reach of Hitler's hand? This is the price of *every* agreement.

Fortunately for Hitler, the Czechs had unsolved problems which he could turn against them.

The most difficult problem which the Czechs had to solve was the national problem, and the most difficult part of it was to readjust the relations between Czechs and Germans. The old Czech-German struggle for power

has reasserted itself under the swastika, and again, as it has so often been in the past, it is a conflict between two different ways of life. The Czechs stand to-day, as in the days of John Huss, for freedom of conscience and democratic liberty. If the Nazis win, the system which denies reason, truth and liberty covers a bit more of the world we live in. That is why the solution of the present conflict between Czechs and Nazis affects not only Czechoslovakia but the whole of the Western world.

In many ways, though less in this vital respect than others, the situation in Czechoslovakia after the war and the present situation closely resemble each other. The internal situation of Czechoslovakia was rather worse in 1919, the external situation rather better. After the war the Sudeten Germans to a man were against the Czechoslovak State and against the Czechoslovak Government. Even the German Social Democrats refused to have anything to do with the Czechs. To-day, however, a substantial minority of the Sudeten Germans is in favour of the Czechoslovak Government and strongly supports it against Henlein and against Hitler. They do so at a tremendous risk, for the whole force of Nazi terrorism is put upon them and they are branded as "traitors," persecuted and threatened. After the war no foreign Government supported the Sudeten German claims. The Austrians signed a treaty with the Czechs in which they promised to expel all Sudeten German agitators and to prevent agitation on Austrian soil. The German Government, as we have seen in Chapter IV, asked the Sudeten Germans to desist from extravagant claims and to accommodate themselves to the Czechoslovak Republic. The Sudeten Germans had no supporters either in Great Britain or in France. This indifference of the Great Powers meant that the question was a purely internal question of the Czechoslovak State and one which the Czechs and Germans were left to decide between themselves. While the problem was restricted to an internal Czech problem,

no danger of European war threatened to issue from it: the Germans were forced to come to terms with the Czechs on the basis of a democratic State, and after a period of futile opposition, Germans co-operated peacefully with Czechs in the Czechoslovak Government. Between 1926 and 1938 there were first two and then three German ministers in the Czechoslovak Government, and the Sudeten German problem was on a fair way to being solved. Complaints and grievances remained, of course, but the means of their redress was open to the Sudeten Germans, and there was every hope of an agreed solution.

This hope was destroyed by the rise of the Nazis in Germany. The Sudeten Germans, noticing the success of Nazi methods of foreign policy, were tempted to exploit the international situation in order to bring pressure to bear on the Czechs. Moreover, in internal affairs they recovered confidence in the methods of obstructing and threatening the Czechs which had failed so lamentably after the war. The Czechs no longer had to deal with 3½ but with 75 million Germans, and therefore, alone against superior numbers, were unable to bring back the Germans to peaceful habits by a consistent refusal to submit to force. The Czech allies could have intervened on the Czech side with greater force than Germany had done for the Sudeten Germans, and thereby maintained the balance. Instead the Allies pursued other tactics, in their foreign policy, which, in effect, put a premium on the use of blackmail methods by Germany and the Sudeten German Nazis.

The relation between the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans has always run parallel to the relations between Germany and Europe. If Great Britain and France accept Nazi peace terms in Europe, the Czechs will be forced to take the same at the hands of the Sudeten Germans. If Germany, on the other hand, accepts the European policy of the democratic powers, the Sudeten Germans will do the same. In 1926, for instance, Ger-

many entered the League of Nations; the Sudeten Germans entered the Czechoslovak Cabinet. There was the same parallel in relations between Germany and Europe, Sudeten Germans and Czechs after the war. The Allies made the disastrous mistake of excluding Germany from full participation in the affairs of Europe. The Czechs made the same mistake in their treatment of the Sudeten Germans.

One of the complaints of the Sudeten Germans, and their main complaint even in the recent months, has been that they were treated as second-class German citizens in a Slav State. "The name of Czechoslovakia for a state containing 3½ million Germans," said Dr. Schacht once in private conversation, "is an insult to the German race." This is how the Sudeten Germans felt. "We will never accept the role of a conquered nation," said Dr. Lodgman, the Sudeten German nationalist leader, "and never the position of a minority. If we are forced to live in this State, to be Czechoslovak citizens, then we wish to be wholly so, to have all the rights which should belong to us. . . ."

Dr. Lodgman's sentiment was perfectly natural, but, in fact, it was largely due to his policy that these rights were not given. The Sudeten Germans backed the wrong horse. They thought Czechoslovakia would collapse, and invested their money in Germany. To-day, it appears a grave mistake on the part of the Czechs not to have been more conciliatory towards the Germans. But then, as now, conciliation meant handing extensive power to actively hostile Germans. Then, as now, the Germans swore to use this power to destroy the Czechoslovak State.

"For us," said Dr. Lodgman, "there is no such thing as high treason," and on the floor of the Czechoslovak Parliament he declared, "Anybody who considers that it is not the highest duty of German members of Parliament to commit high treason against this State, is making a big mistake."

In that atmosphere, it is not surprising that the Czechs took every precaution to secure the administration of the State in their own hands, to weaken the German and to strengthen their own position. In that atmosphere it was thought to be the only way of ensuring the safety of the country. The acts of the Germans were not different from their words. Everywhere they used obstruction, provocation, disorder, and threats in order to intimidate the Czechs. But since the whole battle was fought out within the country between German and Czech with no outside interference, the Czechs were far from intimidated. Their governing capacities, as we have shown, are strong, and their instinct for orderly government soon got the better of the German obstructionist tactics. If the Germans did not wish to come in and play the game, the Czechs maintained they could stay out and play later according to Czech rules. The Czechs were not going to wait about for a constitution, a language law, social measures and land-reform till the Germans chose to co-operate in their making.

Therefore the Czechs went ahead without the Sudeten Germans and passed the main laws which outlined the political future of the State. The Germans found themselves, in fact as well as in law, a minority over whose head, and in spite of whose opposition, the business of ruling could be carried on. The measures re-established the earlier balance between German and Czech. The Sudeten Germans were given equality of rights, but their privileges were taken away. The Czechs were undoubtedly tactless but the Sudeten Germans were themselves very largely to blame. "The land which the Sudeten Germans live in is ours and ours it will remain," said President Masaryk on his return to Czechoslovakia. "We have created and upheld our State: we are building it afresh. I can only wish that the Germans will co-operate with us in this. That would be a better policy than their present abortive activities."

On several occasions the Czechs tried to come to terms with the Sudeten Germans. In 1919 Tusař, the Socialist Prime Minister, had a long conversation with German Socialists and Nationalists. The two groups outbid each other in rabid nationalism. In 1920 Tusař tried again, his intention being to reach some sort of co-operation between social democrats of all nationalities,—Germans, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks. The Sudeten German Social Democrats, like Henlein to-day, specified two conditions: revision of the constitution and a change in foreign policy. Much progress has since been made. To-day the German Socialists, Liberals, and Communists—20 per cent of the Germans—uphold both the democratic and foreign policy of the Czechoslovak Government. In 1921 the Czechs made another effort and Masaryk had a long talk with the German Agrarian leader, Křepek. A sharp, negative communiqué was promptly issued by Lodgman and co-operation between Czech and German again shipwrecked.

By this policy the Sudeten Germans played into the hands of the Czech Nationalists. Those Czechs who favoured conciliation with the Germans were discredited. The strong Left-Wing and Liberal majority in the Czechoslovak Parliament collapsed with the split in the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party. In 1921 the Tusař Government fell, and its place was taken first by a Government of officials, then by a series of Governments under Agrarian Premiers. Men like Baxa, the ultra-nationalist Mayor of Prague, obtained the upper hand in Czech politics. Those who would have pursued a conciliatory policy like Beneš, and Masaryk, Tusař and Bechyně, the Social democrats, were not listened to. Masaryk, as President of the Republic, could not speak with a voice widely contrary to those of his Governments. Yet his efforts were always on the side of conciliation and he never renounced his original aim which he wrote to Beneš in Paris in October 1918:

"We must negotiate with our Germans in order that they shall accept the State, which must not be a nationalist creation but a modern, progressive democracy."

The Czechs made mistakes, but much of the blame must be put on the Sudeten Germans themselves, not a little on the Austrian régime which had weighted the balance so strongly against the Czechs. Their history with the Germans from the days of Huss onwards had convinced the Czechs that one injustice after another had been committed against them. It was these injustices which they considered themselves to be redressing when they took the land from the rich German landowners and distributed it among the Czech landless peasants, when they shut German and opened Czech schools, dismissed officials, re-established the predominance of the Czech over the German language, when they reclaimed as theirs the superior position in the country. Of course they made mistakes; of course it was a mistake from the first to erect a nationalist State in Central Europe and expect the Germans to feel enthusiasm for the position of a minority. But this was not the mistake of the Czechs alone. The Germans themselves, by denying the State, excluded themselves from full participation in it and this position of the Germans as a minority was confirmed by international treaty.

The Minorities Treaties, which confirmed the position of the Sudeten Germans as a "minority" in the "Czechoslovak State," were signed between the principal Allied Powers and all the new or enlarged States of Eastern Europe which contained national minorities. According to these Treaties, the minorities were protected from discrimination on account of their nationality, and "were given equality before the law and their educational and language rights were guaranteed" by the League of Nations. If a minority considered that its rights had been infringed by the Government of the

country it inhabited, it could appeal to the League Council by sending a petition. If this petition was considered technically admissible, it was forwarded to the Government concerned. The Government was expected to add its comments to the petition and return it. The petition was then forwarded to members of the Council "for purposes of information."

Art. XIV: "Czechoslovakia agrees that any member of the Council of the League of Nations shall have the right to bring to the attention of the Council any infraction or any danger of infraction, of any of these obligations, and the Council may thereupon take such action and give such direction as it thinks right and effective in the circumstances."

It must be admitted that negligence of this procedure resulted in inadequate protection to all minorities, though least of all to the Sudeten Germans. Their petitions were far too often quashed by their own Governments and far too seldom obtained a hearing before the League. There were, for instance, twenty-three Sudeten German petitions which the Sudeten Germans considered to have been given inadequate attention. The failure to examine these petitions, even if the petitions were unjustified, certainly helped to turn the Sudeten Germans to other methods of redressing their grievances.

The most sensible means and the one which the Czechs alone, of all the East European States, genuinely provided, was the means of democratic activity in Parliament and in the country. The Germans, as has already been said, have exactly the same political rights as the Czechs, both in Parliament, in local government, in trade unions and in works committees. They have their own political parties, and questions may be asked in Parliament in exactly the same way as is done here. They have their own press and their own means of propaganda. None of these rights are possessed by Germans in Germany. Nor do Reich Germans, except

with special permission, have the possibility of foreign travel which the Sudeten Germans have. If a Reich German ever used journeys abroad for the purpose of agitation against his Government, as Henlein does in this country against the Czechoslovak Government, he would be arrested and shot on his return.

Civil and political liberty was guaranteed to all the nationalities of Czechoslovakia so long as their activities were not considered hostile to the State. The word "hostile" was undoubtedly given a wider application for Germans and Hungarians and Communists than for Czechs and Slovaks. To-day, however, Henlein can threaten to call in a foreign army without being tried for treason, and has been allowed to plot with impunity the downfall of the Czechoslovak State. The Nazis have obtained by the threat of war the suspension of justice in territory beyond their frontier, and the relations between Czechs and Germans have steadily deteriorated since the Nazis intervened. Undoubtedly before that time Czechs and Germans trod on each other's toes, hurt each other's feelings, were frightened of each other and, more often than not, cordially disliked each other, but this was both inevitable and transitory. They had always lived together in those self-same frontiers, shared each other's history, developed side by side, and periods of hostility had always alternated with periods of co-operation. It was inevitable, however, that the sudden reversal of their fortunes, the displacement of German by Czech, would poison their relations for a decade or two; inevitable, if left to themselves, that they would again settle down to a common and co-operative life.

Fundamentally, time was on the side of the more conciliatory Germans and the wiser Czechs. It is time alone which, first in the form of a devastating economic crisis, and then in the form of a Nazi revolution in all parts of the world where Germans live, which has once more poisoned the relations between German and Czech.

"There are among the Germans," said Tusar, the Socialist Prime Minister, "very irreconcilable gentlemen. But if the greater part of the German people sees that the State assures justice and equality for all, they will become loyal citizens."

This was the ultimate aim, all but achieved, of the Czechs. If, in the first years after the war, they emphasised that it was *their* State, *their* country, *their* government, *their* democracy, *their* history, *their* spirit, *their* freedom which counted, this was inevitable. They had been through great sufferings and centuries of oppression and at last had won national freedom. Nationalism would have died down and was dying down.

"We need fifty years of undisturbed development and then we shall be where we would like to be to-day," said Masaryk.

In fact, it is not their mistakes for which the Czechs should be criticised but for their remarkable generosity and courage in dealing with the Germans for which they must be admired. The same spirit was not shown by the Germans. No Masaryk rose from their ranks, no political ideal was formed afresh. They ceased to oppose, obstruct and threaten the Czechs, when they saw that these methods had no effect. To-day, emboldened by the weight of 70 million guns behind them, they have resorted to their former ways. Within the first six years of the Republic, the Czechs, left to their own solution of the problem, had persuaded the greater majority of the Germans to renounce these tactics for those of democracy and discussion. The problem to-day is to allow the Czechs once again to find this solution. They are being prevented from doing so.

In the early days of the Republic there were several German parties. The Germans, like the Czechs, were divided into parties according to their social and economic interests and their political ideas. Like the Czechs, in every contact with the other nation, the

national interest took precedence over all others. There were the two nationalist parties on the Right. The nationalists under Lodgman, and the Nazis under Krebs and Jung. The Nazi Party, as we have seen, was formed during the war by the Sudeten Germans several years before Hitler's party was formed in Munich. In the first elections these two Right-Wing parties, collaborating together, obtained 328,000 votes and were the second largest German party in the Czechoslovak Parliament. The largest party was the Social Democratic Party (690,000) which, though it refused close co-operation with the Right-Wing parties, was no less nationalist and firmly refused co-operation with the Czech Socialist parties. Between these two wings were several small, and, in social policy, moderate parties. The two largest were the Christian Socialists (Catholic Clericals) (213,000), and the Agrarians (240,000).

After 1922-3, the Sudeten German hope in the collapse of Czechoslovakia faded, and it was obvious that their own efforts to bring about that collapse had brought them no advantages. A large section of the population began to see that the policy of setting fire to their own roof was not really advantageous. Under the leadership of Dr. Spina, a University Professor and one of the leaders of the German Agrarian Party, many Sudeten Germans began to oppose this policy and to work for Czech-German co-operation.

In 1925-6, the year in which there was general appeasement and Germany was brought into the League of Nations and signed the Locarno Pact, the German Agrarian and German Christian Socialist Parties entered a Czechoslovak Coalition Government under the Agrarian Premiership of Švehla. Dr. Spina was Minister of Public Works and Dr. Mayr-Harting, the Christian Socialist, was Minister of Justice. This policy of active co-operation was pursued by the greater

majority of the Sudeten Germans up to 1935 and by a very strong minority up to March of this year, when Hitler annexed Austria and intimated to the Sudeten Germans that it was their turn next. It must be admitted that this policy of "activism," as it was called, was a little bit disappointing. Even the principle of proportionalism recognised in the Agreement of February 20, 1937—the most liberal agreement ever reached between a Government and a minority—failed to achieve its purpose. It was perhaps unfortunate that the Germans were first brought into the cabinet by a Right-Wing Government and that this co-operation savoured more of a tactical move against the Left-Wing Czechs than of a genuine change of heart. In 1929 this position was improved slightly by the presence of the Sudeten German Social Democrats in the Government. The next few years, however, were years of acute economic anxiety. The world economic crisis burst with full force on the over-industrialised Sudeten German districts and unemployment increased in thousands week by week. In 1928, it was only 29,000. Less than five years later, it was close on a million.

The Czechoslovak economic system and State finances were not designed to meet this appalling catastrophe. Unemployment benefit was small and public works on a giant scale, which relieved the immediate danger of starvation in other countries, could not be started in a small country. Faced with poverty amounting almost to starvation, the Sudeten Germans caught at any explanation of their suffering, any remedy for it which was offered.

A hard core of intransigence and hostility to the Czechs had lingered on after the majority turned to co-operation. The Nationalist and Nazi Parties, though their numbers were reduced, remained in existence and spread poison between Czechs and Germans. The economic crisis gave them their opportunity. The Sudeten German Nazis told their people that the

Czechs were deliberately starving them, that they wanted them all to die, that Adolf Hitler across the border was going to save Germans from the same intentions which were fostered by the British and French against Germany.

Sudden poverty invariably breeds radicalism. For the last century the Sudeten Germans have always been the most nationalist group in Europe and therefore, in their new distress, they turned instinctively to national remedies rather than to socialist ones. The membership of the Nazi party went up in leaps and bounds during the crisis. By 1932 it was estimated that its membership was bigger than a quarter million and that it would win a crushing victory over the other German parties in the parliamentary elections which were due in 1935. The relations between the Sudeten German Nazi Party and Hitler's organisation, which had been maintained through all the years of Hitler's opposition in Germany, were strengthened by Hitler's seizure of power in January, 1933, and great excitement broke out in the Sudeten districts. In February occurred the Reichstag fire and the Nazi Government started to mop up all non-Nazi elements in Germany.

In Czechoslovakia the Government took the steps which the last German democratic Governments failed to take and paid for with the utter destruction of everything they stood for. The Czechoslovak Government prepared to ban the Nationalist and Nazi Parties. In October, 1933, the Sudeten Nazis dissolved themselves, and the Nationalists were broken up. Prior to this, however, negotiations had been going on between the various Sudeten nationalist groups, though Henlein was at some pains to point out afterwards that these came to nothing. His own appearance as the leader of a "Sudeten German Homeland Front" in October, 1933, was, he affirmed, a spontaneous act; the official historian of the Party even goes so far as to call it "the coming to pass of a miracle!" In fact this miracle, like many

miracles, had been prepared some little time in advance. Konrad Henlein was one of the leading gymnastic teachers of the Sudeten Germans, apparently a humble, but in fact an important position, for, as he wrote in an article, "Men wish to be led in manly fashion." So Henlein appeared to lead them.

Exactly where he intended to lead them, nobody knew. He "appealed above all parties and estates." He had declared "war to the death on Liberalism" (1931). He proceeded to declare that he would "never abandon Liberalism" (1934). He accepted "the fundamental demands of democracy" (1933). He confessed "the fundamental national socialist principles of life which inspire our thoughts and our actions" (1938). He announced that it was "senseless to suppose that self-Government could mean a Sudeten German Parliament or anything like it" (1934), and he demanded complete, territorial autonomy (1938).

"National Socialism," said Konrad Henlein in 1938, "corresponds with the manners and character of the German. Here he finds his own outlook on life and morals after years of vain desire." At the moment when the concentration camp, the horsewhip, the glorification of murder and the bigger and better lie were being introduced into Germany for the first time, Henlein hesitated to commit himself. After these innovations had proved their worth by more concentration camps, bigger whips, the murder of old comrades (Strasser, Röhm, Heines) and had been extended to the Saar and to Austria, Henlein decided that they corresponded to the "manners and character of the German."

"By skilful and sustained use of propaganda," wrote Hitler in *Mein Kampf* (p. 302 of 1933 edition), "one can make a people see Heaven as Hell, or the most wretched life as paradise." Hitler's pronouncement would excuse Henlein if he had not lived outside Germany and been free from sustained propaganda; it would excuse him had he not suited his story all along

to his listener, and had not so many stories been published, compared, and found contradictory.

It is little to be wondered that a serious setback in Czech-German co-operation followed the imposition of a Nazi régime in Germany. The contrast in the reactions of Czech and German revealed the psychological abyss which still remained unbridged. Nazism is something so abhorrent to Czech democratic enlightenment that its appearance in Germany aroused the Czechs' latent dislike of the Germans. The Nazis stressed everywhere that "Nazi" and "German" were identical terms and the Czechs, with 3½ million Germans in their midst, were faced with the dilemma of reconciling their hatred of everything Nazi, with a policy of conciliating the increasingly Nazi Sudeten Germans to the Czechoslovak democratic State.

But the Czechs have developed considerably in the last twenty years and, though strongly anti-Nazi are not yet anti-German. For the persecuted Germans, Czechoslovakia has become a refuge. Czechoslovakia has been the most generous of all the countries of Europe in its treatment of political and racial refugees. In the eyes of the Sudeten German Nazis this humanitarian spirit towards the German democrats constitutes an act of hostility towards Germany. Prague has become the home of the "other Germany"—the Germany of Goethe and Kleist, of the poets and musicians. But this only increases the Nazis' enmity. Prague is a standing reproach not only of German Liberals to German Nazis but of "inferior" Slav democrats whose liberty is greater than that possessed by the "Nordic Master Nation." The Germans, Hitler may well consider, "would wear their chains with the less reluctance if the prospect and example of freedom were on every side removed from before their eyes."

## CHAPTER X

### MARCH 1938: INTERNATIONAL CZECH SITUATION

"THE lamps are going out all over Europe," said Sir Edward Grey in 1914. In 1938 they are being extinguished one by one as the Nazis lay their hands on the last refuges of German freedom and draw them into the giant war-machine of Nazi Germany.

Nazi Germany is moving on to absolute control. In 1935 the great industrial resources of the Saar Basin came into her hands; conscription was immediately declared for the German Army. In 1936 that Army marched into the Rhineland. All through 1937 the Nazis worked on their armaments, conscripting labour and capital, restricting consumption, production, foreign trade. They fortified on the East, the West and in East Prussia. In 1938 they broke into Austria and stood astride the Danube Basin.

The German invasion of Austria profoundly shocked the whole of Europe—not only the fact of it but the way it was done. Germany mobilised secretly and prepared in silence. With protestations of innocence, declarations that his hand had been forced and he came suddenly as a liberator, Adolf Hitler sent troops into Austria and himself followed in their wake.

Yet the invasion had been planned long before. The material and men which had been called up came from distant parts of Germany weeks previously. Germany was on a war-basis, therefore nothing untoward was noticed.

The police sent from Prussia to patrol Vienna knew the plan of the streets like their native towns. The

troops took up their billets without needing to ask the way. The guards posted on frontiers had printed lists of all those who were to be arrested as they tried to leave the country. Whole hotels were booked weeks ahead by German "tours". In one Vienna Hotel the tour arrived on the eve of the invasion. The next day the "tour" came down to breakfast in the uniform of Reichswehr officers. The General Staff preceded the Army !

In a single night, accompanied by the belated protestations of Great Britain and France, Nazi Germany undid the work of twenty years, flouted the obligation to respect the independence of Austria voluntarily reaffirmed a few weeks previously, and struck a devastating blow at the whole foundations of the Peace.

"By what has happened it is not too much to say that Nazi Germany in its present mood, and if matters are left as they are, is in a position to dominate the whole of South-Eastern Europe over an area inhabited perhaps by 200,000,000 people. Nazidom is moving on to absolute control." (Winston Churchill in the House of Commons, March 14th, 1938.)

Among these 200,000,000 lived the Czechs—a mere handful. "No doubt they are only a small democratic State; no doubt they have an Army only two or three times as large as ours; no doubt they have a munitions supply only three times as great as that of Italy; but still, they are a virile people, they have their rights, they have their treaty rights, they have a line of fortresses, and they have a strongly manifested will to live freely. Czechoslovakia is at this moment isolated in the economic and in the military sense" (*ibid*).

It was touch and go whether the Nazis would not attack there and then. It has been touch and go ever since. Just as, two months previous to the Anschluss, the Nazis gave their spoken word to the Austrians, so now they gave it to the Czechs. "I am informed,"

said Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons, March 14th, 1938, "that Field Marshal Göring on March 11th gave a general assurance to the Czech Minister in Berlin—an assurance which he expressly renewed on behalf of Herr Hitler—that it would be the earnest endeavour of the German Government to improve German-Czech relations. In particular on March 12th, Field-Marshal Göring informed the Czech Minister that German troops marching into Austria had received the strictest orders to keep at least fifteen kilometres from the Czechoslovak frontier. On the same day, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin was assured by Baron von Neurath that Germany considered herself bound by the German-Czechoslovak Arbitration Convention of October, 1925." (This last was part of the Treaty of Locarno which had three parts. 1. *A Rhineland Pact* guaranteeing the defortification of the German Rhineland—torn up by Germany, 1936. 2. *A Guarantee Treaty* between France and Czechoslovakia—since confirmed on several occasions. 3. *Arbitration Treaty* between Germany and Czechoslovakia. The last two applied also to Poland.)

The frequent discrepancy between Nazi words and Nazi actions immediately reappeared. A press and radio campaign, unprecedented in the history of international relations, was let loose against the Czechs. Ominous troop movements started on the Czechoslovak frontier immediately after the invasion of Austria. In April, both the British and the Czechs made enquiries in Berlin and were informed that the movements were "mere routine." In all the speeches of the German leaders the frontiers of Czechoslovakia were ostentatiously excluded from those which Germany declared to be inviolable. The German press openly spoke of Czechoslovakia, as they had spoken of Austria, as a State whose rapid disintegration was as desirable as it was inevitable, and whose collapse Germany had every right and every intention of furthering.

There was a ghastly similarity in the Czech and the Austrian situations. Both lay in the path of Hitler's direct advance down the Danube and the command of both was important for military reasons. Both contained German-speaking populations, some of whom, fanatically in favour of Hitler, were ready to sponsor his advance into the interior of their country; others, as fervently anti-Nazi and representing a constant proof that "Nazi" and "German" are not the same thing. Both were weak, and, alone against Germany, practically defenceless.

But there were essential differences also in the Czech and Austrian situations. In the first place, the Czechs, unlike the Austrians, cared intensely for their own independence. They had won it after too many centuries of foreign rule, enjoyed it for too short a time to regard the loss of it as anything less than a major catastrophe. Faced with a German attack, they were absolutely determined at all costs to defend their country. To the Austrians, after all, the Germans were the same nation and incorporation in Germany, though it might offend local feeling, was not a loss of national independence, whereas appeal by Austria to a non-German State for defence against Germany was akin to national treachery. To the Czechs, the Germans were the traditional enemy, the traditional oppressor. Those same Czechs who had risked their lives as young men during the war to oppose the Austrians and Germans were now at the helm in Czechoslovak affairs. They were not going to surrender lightly, in 1938, that which it had been their life's work to create. Even those who had hesitated to work for the foundation of the State now had a stake in its existence. There was no question but that the Czechs of 1938 were more determined and united than the Czechs of 1914. Unlike some British politicians they knew that the war of 1914-18 had not been fought in vain, and the fact that twenty years later they were faced with a new war convinced them not of the futility of the earlier struggle,

but of the necessity to fight over and over again for the things they believed in.

Moreover Czechoslovakia, unlike Austria, is a democracy and the people have a real stake in the independence of their own country. There are, of course, the Sudeten Germans, ready as ever to welcome the invader, but among them are the German Liberals, Socialists and Communists who know that their lives depend on the continued independence and integrity of the Czechoslovak State.

The Czechs, unlike the Austrians, have not only the will but the means to defend themselves. The whole length of their frontier with Germany is fortified. They have a first-class Army, entirely in their own hands, and an excellent Air Force. Furthermore, they do not rely on international guarantees as Austria did. They rely on alliances and the essence of an alliance is that it answers the need of both parties. These alliances Czechoslovakia has both with Russia and with France. Neither the one nor the other can afford to see a puppet Nazi Government installed in Prague, nor a further extension of the German frontiers. The independence and integrity of Czechoslovakia is vital to the whole post-war settlement of Europe and to the balance established in 1919. Not only Russia and France but Great Britain also is vitally concerned. It can hardly be supposed that what these countries fought four years to achieve, they would not care to defend. It was a matter less of idealism than of self-interest. While Czechoslovakia is independent and can mobilise an army of 900,000, can menace Dresden, Leipsig, Breslau and Nuremberg, Germany will certainly not risk an attack on Great Britain or France. But once she controls Czechoslovakia and the Czech armament works, Germany will possess an armaments capacity double that of Great Britain and France together. In the normal course of events and patriotic calculations, the Czechoslovak Government might presume that Britain and France were interested in Nazi aggression in Central Europe.

Conditions in the whole world had reached such a pass that not only Czechoslovakia, but the whole of Central Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East, could only be saved if Great Britain incurred serious risks and certain sacrifices. In the first place Britain was faced with the necessity for a wider foreign policy, for commitments in new parts of the world, and above all for a more constructive Central European policy. The British refusal to have a Central European policy or any definite responsibility in Central European affairs had discouraged all the allies which Britain needed if Czechoslovakia were to be saved and the Central European system maintained on the democratic basis which the Allies had constructed after the war. It was a matter less of saving Czechoslovakia than of bringing back the world to peaceful habits; that is, to respect for the integrity and independence of weaker countries and the recognition of another standard of public morality than blackmail and war.

The unopposed annexation of Austria (praised for its peaceful character by the Archbishop of Canterbury) stirred profound anxiety in the whole of Europe. It was not a new terror but the deepening despair which each unopposed advance of the Nazis increased. "Our affairs have come to such a pass," said Mr. Winston Churchill, "that we cannot possibly escape without taking risks." With each delay, Mr. Churchill asked, "how many friends would be alienated, how many potential allies should we see go one by one down the grizzly gulf. . . . Why should we delay until we are confronted with a general landslide of those small countries passing over, because they have no other choice, to the overwhelming power of the Nazi régime?"

This is what was happening on all the frontiers of Germany. This is why Czechoslovakia was isolated in Central Europe. Her immediate neighbours were Hungary and Poland; the strongest Central European power after Germany was Italy.

As early as 1934 Poland saw that British policy—and to a lesser degree, French policy also—would lead inevitably to far-reaching concessions to Germany; these concessions, the Poles argued, would be paid for first by the small nations and only afterwards by the Great Powers themselves. Colonel Beck, Foreign Minister of Poland, therefore, decided on a pro-Nazi policy, hoping in this way to deflect German attention away from the Polish corridor towards southward expansion—towards Austria and Czechoslovakia. Colonel Beck was eminently successful and having seen Austria go under, he prepared to sacrifice Czechoslovakia. His aim, if Germany should seize the Sudeten German districts, was to snatch back Teschen (over which the Poles and the Czechs quarrelled in 1918–20) and if possible secure a common frontier with Hungary by the partition of Czechoslovakia. The Nazi leaders naturally encouraged this policy and General Göring, when he visited Colonel Beck in the spring, even went so far as to suggest that Poland should annex part of Slovakia; while Hungary should be compensated for this loss of what she would regard as her share of the spoils, with part of Rumania.

In other words the Nazis encouraged the Poles to cheat their allies, the Rumanians, and to scheme with Hungary against the Czechs. The Hungarians had few scruples. Immediately after the Anschluss, the Regent of Hungary, Admiral Horthy, declared that “the union of Austria with Germany means no more to us than that an old friend of Hungary, which had been placed in an impossible position by the Peace Treaty, has now been united with another old friend and true ally.” The post-Anschluss situation in Hungary looked exceedingly grave. There was a serious danger of Naziphil Government in Budapest and though the actual change—the appointment of Imredy as Prime Minister instead of Daranyi—was one designed to strengthen Hungarian independence, it was obvious that no help for Czecho-

slovakia could be expected from it. Nevertheless the rulers of Hungary were themselves beginning to be afraid of Germany, and realised full well that a Nazi expansion must spell disaster for the independence of Hungary. The pro-Nazi party, in its hatred for the Jews and the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia), the "successors" of Austria Hungary, preferred subservience to the Nazis to a policy of collaboration. The more liberal party won a slight victory in the Bled Agreement between Hungary and the Little Entente in August 1938. Hungary signed a non-aggression pact in return for recognition of her right to re-arm. The question of the minorities, however, remained open, and the Hungarian urge to use this as a weapon against the Czechs was by no means removed. Admiral Horthy showed a welcome spirit of independence during his visit to Herr Hitler, but no more. Hungary remained an unreliable, if not positively hostile, factor in the Czechoslovak situation. Hungary still trembles on the brink of subservience to the Nazis, if not of an Anschluss with the German Reich.

The Yugoslavs, like the Poles and Hungarians, decided long before the annexation of Austria that there was little to be expected from the Western Powers except *desinteressement* if not connivance in German advance in Central Europe; the Anschluss crisis confirmed their fears. The Government of Yugoslavia had, therefore, sometime previously adopted a policy which was pro-German in its effect, if not in its motive. German war material was displacing English in the Yugoslav Army. Frequent State visits were cementing the political and economic bonds of friendship. According to Stoyadinovitch, the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Hitler had personally assured him that Germany desired a strong Yugoslavia. After the Anschluss, the German Minister in Belgrade assured the Yugoslav Government that Germany considered the Yugoslav-German frontier as inviolable, which was important. In view of Ger-

many's natural inclination to expand to the Adriatic coast at the expense of Yugoslavia this declaration was interesting. In view of Hitler's definition of a promise, the interest was largely academic. Temporarily, however, the promise held. "Germany has three frontiers," said Hitler, "which she does not need to defend—with Italy, Hungary and Yugoslavia."

It was obvious from the speeches of Italian spokesmen, from the ostentatious German assurances of the sacredness of the Brenner frontier, from the touching exchange of promises between the dictators—"Mussolini, ich werde es Ihnen nie vergessen" (I will never forget what you have done)—that Mussolini had no previous knowledge of Hitler's intention to invade Austria on March 11th. But it is equally obvious that Mussolini had accepted the Anschluss as ultimately inevitable and was merely profoundly disturbed at its taking place when it did. The union of Austria with Germany was the price Italy had to pay for the German friendship which she needed above all in the Mediterranean. The disaster of the Anschluss for Italy was not that it took place but that it took place before Italy had consolidated her Mediterranean position in Spain and in Africa. There was a serious displacement of forces in South-Eastern Europe before Italy was ready. "It is believed in some quarters," said Signor Gayda to the Congress on Foreign Relations in Milan on June 2nd, "that Germany will now establish her predominance in the Danubian and Balkan States. The Danube seems destined to become, by a link with the Main and the Rhine, the great waterway joining the Black Sea and the North Sea. . . .

"On the other hand, the foreign policy of Italy has two vital points of interest, Africa and the Near East. Italy will never disinterest herself in the Balkans and there can be no serious clash between Germany and Italy in that part of the world. I am confident that the solidarity of Germany and Italy

already manifest in all fields will be operative also in the Balkans."

This speech betrays obvious alarm on the part of Italy's spokesman. It was this which induced the British and French Governments, and to a certain extent even the Czechoslovak Government, to aim at winning back Italy to a policy of co-operation in South-Eastern Europe. Italy was closely allied with Hungary (under the Rome Protocols which allied Italy, Austria and Hungary) and had suddenly developed a warm friendship for Yugoslavia. Since it had been chiefly the enmity of Italy and Yugoslavia which had kept Italy on cool terms with the other two members of the Little Entente (Rumania and Czechoslovakia), it was hoped that this friendship would lead to one between all the Little Entente countries and Italy. Prior to 1935, Italy had been one of the main enemies of German expansion in South-Eastern Europe, even though, by her policy in Austria and elsewhere, she steadily undermined every source of resistance to that expansion.

It was obvious, however, from the failure of Mr. Chamberlain's policy of Anglo-Italian co-operation in the spring of 1938 that (in peace time at any rate) Italy was no more to be won. The axis was firm and the British attempt (as one Government spokesman put it) to make it easier for Italy to betray Germany, merely made it easier for Italy to betray Britain. To all intents and purposes the Anschluss solidified the axis by putting Germany on the Brenner and on the Danube, so that Italian relations with Hungary and with Yugoslavia were supervised. At the end of July the Hungarian Premier, Dr. Imredy, visited Rome and there was some speculation about the meaning of the visit. Some saw in it a renewed effort on the part of Italy to prevent German expansion down the Danube. Hungary, it was hoped, would draw closer to the Little Entente and an Italian-Yugoslav-Hungarian *bloc* be formed for the purpose. The visit to Italy was succeeded by one to

Germany during which the agreement between the Little Entente and Hungary was actually signed. But it would be wildly optimistic to see in this agreement an Italian-Hungarian-Little Entente bloc against Germany. "Germany and Italy," wrote an inspired German commentary from Rome in the early summer, "recognise the necessity of assisting each other, if necessary, to the utmost. In these circumstances no treaty or alliance is needed, but merely the simple realisation that two friends must march side by side to the end."

Czechoslovakia, therefore, could rely on the friendship of neither Poland, Hungary, Italy nor Yugoslavia. In the first and last of these two countries, however, opposition to the Government was growing and in both cases took a strongly pro-Czech line. The Yugoslav Government, therefore, reassured the Czech Government of its fidelity on several occasions during the summer of 1938.

The situation of Czechoslovakia in Central Europe was becoming desperate: the situation of Germany correspondingly strong. Germany at last stood firmly on the Danube and looked down the Danube valley. She controlled all the roads, rivers and railways from Vienna to the countries of the former Empire. She had three new frontiers—with Hungary, Yugoslavia and Italy. The Rome-Berlin axis had become a solid block of territory which completely separated Eastern and Western Europe and had access to the North Sea, and the Baltic, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Germany was in military and economic control of all Czechoslovakia's communications to the South and to the West. Most important of all, Germany now almost completely surrounded the capital districts of Czechoslovakia and took up position on the Southern as well as the northern end of the bottleneck which joins Bohemia-Moravia with Slovakia. In war time German potentialities were increased by the addition of recruits from a population of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  millions, and by the lengthen-

ing of the enemy line by 250 miles (the German-Czech frontier is 800 miles long). If Germany had chosen to attack there and then, as many observers anticipated, she would have found unfilled gaps in the Czech southern line of fortifications. If she chose to wait, she sacrificed this opportunity but instead was able to dig herself into Austria, to prevent any flank attack against the weak Austrian defences on the part of Czechoslovakia and to frighten Yugoslavia from daring to attack Hungary should the Hungarians join with the Germans in an attack on the Czechs.

Moreover, there were the "peaceful means" of provoking civil war between Czechs and Sudeten Germans and of strangling Czechoslovakia economically. Germany now had control of Czechoslovakia's main trade routes with the outside world. Before March, 1938, Germany controlled the passage of Czech goods down the Elbe to the port of Hamburg. Now she controlled traffic on the railway lines between Czechoslovakia and Trieste as well. With Germany in control of the two main trade routes of this inland State, it seemed a matter of time only before Czechoslovakia was economically strangled. Czechoslovakia was at the mercy of Germany. Her only outlets were the inconvenient and unnatural outlets down the Danube to the Black Sea, which was at the good will of Hungary, and to the Baltic via Gdynia, which was at the mercy of Poland; and both Poland and Hungary were, as we have seen, inclined to act as agents of Nazi policy against Czechoslovakia. Mr. Winston Churchill gave a graphic picture of the Czechoslovak situation in his speech of March 14th.

"Czechoslovakia is at this moment isolated in the economic and military sense. Her trade outlet through Hamburg, which is based upon the Peace Treaty, can, of course, be closed at any moment. Now her communications by rail and river to the South, and after the South to the South-West, are liable to be

severed at any moment. Her trade may be subjected to tolls of a destructive character. Here is a country which was once the greatest manufacturing area in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. . . . She may be cut off from the natural markets which she has established there. The economic life of this small state may be very largely strangled as a result of the act of violence which was perpetrated last Friday night (the invasion of Austria). A wedge had been driven into the heart of what is called the Little Entente."

Immediately after the Anschluss, commercial negotiations were started between Germany and Czechoslovakia, and though they were broken off at the time of the crisis on May 21st, they were started again afterwards. The Germans negotiated in perfect good temper. Their economic policy in the summer of 1938 was to lay their hands on all the raw materials they could buy. Except in one respect, they were more interested in procuring supplies for themselves than in economically harming the Czechs.

The chief questions were those which concerned the trade between Austria and Czechoslovakia, their purpose was to decide whether the relations between Czechoslovakia and Austrian industries could be maintained and whether Vienna would remain an important commercial centre for Czechoslovak exports for South-Eastern Europe. There were other questions, too, raised by the removal of the customs barrier between Austria and Germany. Austria threatened to supplant Czechoslovakia as the chief supplier of wood to Germany, and it is significant that one of the first Nazi acts after the Anschluss was the prohibition of the export of Austrian timber. On the whole, the Nazi Government put no direct economic pressure on Czechoslovakia, but she steadily refused to discuss the question of transit between Czechoslovakia and the ports of Trieste and Hamburg, and with as much ingenuity

as meanness, she proceeded to organise the trade of Eastern Europe so as to make it pass round the long border of Czechoslovakia rather than cross that territory. Economically, Germany was restrained from reprisals on a larger scale by her own need of imports and foreign exchange, and by fear of retaliatory measures on the part of the Czech allies. The French threatened in May to cut off the German supply of iron ore, and the Nazis could not risk alienating Great Britain and the United States who are both, especially the latter, important customers of Czechoslovakia. If the United States started on the game of economic reprisals which Britain showed herself to be contemplating at the time of the German refusal to pay the Austrian debt charges, Germany and not Czechoslovakia would be the chief loser.

As it happened, other countries, including Germany's friends, had something to say on the matter. On June 1st the Italian press published particulars of the trade agreement between Italy and Germany. Germany, it said, had promised that no measures should be taken by the manipulation of transit dues to divert traffic artificially from Trieste to other ports. Particularly, it was emphasised, Germany undertook that through traffic from Czechoslovakia should not be less favourably treated than before the Anschluss.

It was also significant that shortly, after the annexation of Austria, a Polish economic delegation in Prague offered Czechoslovakia favourable rates on the Polish railways to Gdynia.

But the worst danger to Czechoslovakia was the threat to her position as the chief industrial Danubian State. This place was now taken by Germany. The German advance to the Danube had opened up for the Nazis new fields to conquer and Germany now prepared ambitious schemes of her own. On July 11th the Danubian correspondent of *The Times* sent the following message from Budapest:

"Signs are accumulating of the acceleration of the German economic drive down the Danube.

"A German Government delegation is touring the Danubian countries and discussing questions of Danube navigation in the light of Germany's withdrawal from the International Danube Control Commission and of the *Anschluss*. By credible report Germany would like to see the Danubian States also withdraw from the International Commission and join her in forming a purely Danubian Commission, to the exclusion of non-Danubian States. Such a Commission would be predominantly under German control, but even without it the Danube is bound to come increasingly under Reich control, especially after the completion of the ship canal linking it with the Rhine.

"Whatever the attitude of Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia at present is unlikely to favour such proposals, since all her interests, policy and traditions link her to the Powers which formed the International Commission. Also, Czechoslovakia is, of all the Danubian countries, the most strongly industrialized and the least dependent on the German market, which has an enormous pull for the other, mainly agricultural, Danubian States. Thus she does not, in her present form, fit in to the plans now taking shape for far-reaching economic collaboration between the Reich and the Danubian States.

"The Customs Union idea (mentioned recently by your Berlin Correspondent) is being mooted but has not yet come to negotiation."

The implication for Czechoslovakia is only too clear, and it will be remembered with what insistence Czechoslovakia clung to her Danubian status at the Peace Conference in 1919. German control of the Danube means German control of the riparian States and Czechoslovakia's reaction to plans of a Danubian Customs Union can be gauged from her reactions in 1931 to the idea of a Customs Union between Germany

and Austria. She opposed this in 1931 for fear that it would lead to just that ambition which in 1938 it has in fact revealed. In a speech to the Czechoslovak Chamber of Deputies in 1931, Beneš said:

"The adherents of this scheme apparently assume that in a sort of complete equality, it is only Czechoslovakia who might join their economic union—as a country whose economic structure is most clearly related to that of the other two . . . Czechoslovakia would have several years to accommodate herself economically to the 70 million German unity, Germany and Austria themselves would not thereby suffer severely in respect of their main interests, and thus there would be formed a great industrial area with a total population of 85 million as a well protected *bloc* in Central Europe . . . The big consuming power of the new industrial *bloc* in agricultural products would of itself bind these countries with vital force to Germany. . . . Politically Czechoslovakia would lose all political importance within a *bloc* of 70 million. Moreover, within a few years Czechoslovakia would be so closely bound economically to Berlin and Vienna that she would lose all her freedom of independent political decision. No reasonable person could demand such a sacrifice from any self-respecting Czechoslovak. All the assurance that our sovereignty and independence would remain intact cannot convince one who has learnt the lessons of the history of our own and of other countries, and especially those of the history of the German Zollverein. . . . The Great War has taught us that the organisation of Europe as desired by us all, cannot be achieved by means of the pre-war preponderance of one large State. Such a predominance of one nation would lead to large political *blocs* and would end in another war. I do not impute bad intentions to anybody. But the political leaders of present-day Germany cannot, with the best possible will, give us a guarantee of future political developments."

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This was written in 1931. Except for the last two sentences, all of it might have been written in 1938. German economic pressure on Czechoslovakia, which is being held in reserve, would have an immediate political importance in so far as it brought the Czechoslovak Government to its knees. But, behind this immediate objective, lie political and economic aims extending far beyond the subjugation of Czechoslovakia.

Economically threatened, politically isolated, and yet forming the block on which Nazi ambitions threatened to fall down, the situation of Czechoslovakia after the annexation of Austria was serious indeed. Resistance in Central Europe to Nazi expansion waited upon encouragement from the Western Powers. If the Nazis were to be deterred from attacking Czechoslovakia, only the resolution of the Western democracies, in alliance with Russia, would suffice.

Declarations were made. On March 14th the French Government repeated the categoric assurances, previously given, that France would honour her engagements to Czechoslovakia in all circumstances; the next day, M. Paul Boncour, the French Foreign Minister, informed the British Ambassador that the French were determined on this issue. Two days later M. Litvinov, the Russian Foreign Minister, made a similar declaration to the press though his declaration was qualified by the condition, already present in the Soviet-Czech Treaty, that if France did not take action, the Russian Government would feel at liberty to act as it chose. Nevertheless, though Nazi Germany was thus publicly informed that she might have to fight France and Russia if she attacked Czechoslovakia, the situation was far from pleasant.

The French Government was formed only on March 13th. On March 10th, on the eve of the German invasion of Austria, the Government of M. Chautemps resigned. France was without a Government for three days during the worst crisis which Europe had passed

through since the war. Furthermore, the Government, when it was formed, after a delay of three days, was obviously a makeshift Government which everybody believed could last only a few weeks. Its declarations in favour of Czechoslovakia were publicly satisfactory since the absence of them would have been catastrophic, but their actual value as a pledge of military support was questionable. The effectiveness of the French Air Force was doubted. Economic conditions in France were unsatisfactory and there were serious cleavages in French public opinion. France was, for the moment, far more interested in her own home squabbles than in her foreign relations. Furthermore, British influence in French politics had been growing stronger and stronger as the threat to French security increased from one direction after another. It was very doubtful whether this influence would be used to prevent further aggression in Central Europe.

In the first week after the Anschluss and, indeed, for a considerable time afterwards, the key to the situation was in Britain. If the British Government would make a clear statement the situation was saved. The events leading to the war were recalled and the fatal reluctance of Grey to inform the Germans that we would fight if Belgium were touched, was compared with the reluctance of Lord Halifax (British Foreign Secretary) to tell Germany that Britain would march if Czechoslovakia were attacked. On March 14th there was a debate on the international situation in Parliament. Mr. Chamberlain, in the House of Commons, and Lord Halifax, in the House of Lords, merely drew attention to the German guarantees given by General Göring to the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin (See p. 135). Lord Halifax, however, insisted that:

“By those assurances, solemnly given and more than once repeated, we naturally expect the German Government to abide, and if indeed they desire to

see European peace maintained, as I earnestly hope they do, there is no quarter in Europe in which it is more vital that undertakings should be scrupulously respected."

On March 24th another opportunity presented itself. Between March 14th and 24th England had been on the brink of a political crisis and the opposition in the country to the policy of buying off the dictators came nearer than ever before to displacing Mr. Chamberlain. Furthermore, for the first time, Mr. Chamberlain himself had come up against the realities of the situation. His first reaction to them was far from satisfactory, in spite of the personal affront which he had sustained at the hand of Herr Ribbentrop (who had strongly denied at lunch time on Friday, March 11th, that the Germans would force the issue with Austria). On the eve of his speech it was taken for granted that Mr. Chamberlain would offer little criticism and no resistance either to German methods or to German aims in the conduct of Central European affairs. His speech showed a remarkable stiffening of tone and for the first time a British Prime Minister went very far to committing his country to the defence of a Central European country.

"Where peace and war are concerned," he said, "legal obligations are not alone involved and, if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations . . . it would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries . . . would immediately become involved. This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France, with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty and determined to uphold them."

Really, this was no more than a statement of fact, but it was an exceedingly important statement. It was

widely considered on the continent that if the British Government saw ahead and informed other Governments of the possible course of events, should Germany attack Czechoslovakia and if this course of events involved Britain in war on the side of the ally of Czechoslovakia, that the British Government had gone a long way towards giving a commitment in Central Europe. This was the only hope of persuading the Nazi Government to a policy of peace. In Berlin, however, the reserve with which this commitment was formulated, was exploited by those who favoured a policy of violence against Czechoslovakia. In the measure in which British policy resumed its traditional ambiguity, conditions in Central Europe steadily deteriorated.

## CHAPTER XI

### MARCH, 1938: INTERNAL CZECH SITUATION

“GERMANY,” said Adolf Hitler in his Reichstag speech of 1935, “will tread no other path than that laid down by the Peace Treaties. We have no thought of invading any other country.” Three years later, having demolished the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler started on the Treaty of St. Germain and invaded Austria.

The Czechs had good reason to suspect that German regiments moved to their frontier, Nazi agents sent to stir up trouble in the Sudeten German districts, a violent press and radio campaign, and openly insulting and threatening speeches by the leaders of the Nazi Empire, had more significance than “assurances solemnly given and more than once repeated.”

From the first the Nazi Government had been systematic in all its actions, and in Czechoslovakia everything was working according to plan. When Germany was weak, the innocence of German intentions was proclaimed—like that above. When Germany was strong, it was the hopelessness of resistance that was stressed. The Nazi plan in Central Europe after the Anschluss was to convince not only the Czechs themselves but all possible allies, that the position of Czechoslovakia was hopeless. The Nazi efforts were directed towards persuading the allies that the internal Czech situation was untenable; and persuading the Czechs that their allies would not stand by them.

These schemes concentrated on London and on the British Government. The Nazis realised that if Britain and France, France and Russia, could be separated, Czechoslovakia would be isolated. France, they assumed,

would not dare fight the Germans without British support. Russia, they knew, was no longer legally committed to the defence of Czechoslovakia if the French failed to honour their undertakings. The Nazis insinuated to the British that if all this happened, there would be no war. They made no allusion to their further plans, and suppressed Goebbels' tactless boast of April 7th, 1938:—

“All this takes place step by step at a time when we run the least possible risk. The risks become smaller the more powerful we become. . . . There was a time when the world spoke of the demands it would make on us. To-day we speak only of the demands which we make on the world.”

The success of Nazi policy depended entirely on Czech capitulation. If the Czechs were prepared to fight for their independence *in all circumstances*, the Nazi Government realised that France, Russia and Britain would inevitably be drawn in and Germany almost certainly defeated. The allies of the Czechs, the Nazis calculated, though they might be ready to see the Czechs capitulate to the threat of force, would be ashamed to allow the use of force. Therefore Nazi schemes were devoted to hollowing out Czech resistance from within and intimidating the Czechoslovak Government from abroad.

To any other people but the Czech whose whole history, as we have seen, has been one of stubborn indomitableness, there would have been no need to exaggerate the danger of the situation.

Czechoslovakia was now geographically in the hollow of Germany's hand; her main districts surrounded on three sides by the Nazis; all her outlets to the sea and her access to the world markets were in their hands. Moreover, as we have seen, the two chief neighbours of Czechoslovakia—Poland and Hungary—were, more or less, in German pay.

Moreover the Nazi Government had a yet more dangerous weapon—to sow the seeds of Nazi revolution in all the frontier provinces of the State. This last means of destroying Czechoslovakia was both the most pernicious, and the most difficult for international diplomacy to withstand. The only effective defence was to stamp out Nazism outside Germany just as Hitler had stamped out freedom within the Third Reich; to employ against the Nazis the same ruthless measures which they employed against others.

There was serious question, however, whether it was not already too late—whether persecution would not merely strengthen a martyred movement and provoke Hitler to intervene with his armies. The Czechs might have been ready to try. Their allies beseeched them to do everything in their power "to avoid an incident." In effect this was to give a free hand to the Nazis. The Sudeten Germans appeared to have the bit between their teeth, and Hitler at their backs. Their intransigence steadily increased throughout the summer. On the other hand, they did everything to order. The Sudeten Germans maintained, as the Henlein leaders explained, "perfect discipline". They waited all the summer, as one observer put it, for the order to lose their patience.

It was more than apparent that Henlein and his followers were the agents of Hitler and therefore must be treated with wariness. Henlein, whose boast it had once been that he had never spoke with Hitler, became a regular visitor to the Fuhrer; and from the co-ordinated tactics pursued by Henlein inside the country, and by Hitler from abroad, it became more and more doubtful whether either Berlin or the Sudeten German Nazis wanted agreement.

There are two policies in the Third Reich, as that renegade Nazi, Otto Strasser, has pointed out (*Time and Tide*, June 18th, 1938): "The aim of the first is the annexation of the Sudeten German districts. The aim of the second is German domination of Czechoslovakia

as a whole. The advocates of the first policy are Hess, Goebbels, Baldur von Schirach and Himmler—the real party men; the advocates of the second are to be found in the General Staff, heavy industry and in such men as Göring, and to a certain extent Schacht."

To this day it is not clear which of these policies is the policy of the Third Reich. Since the tactics were the same whichever policy was pursued, there was no need to decide. The Nazi aim was to enable the Sudeten Germans steadily to raise their demands to the point at which either the Czechs accepted them and the second policy was fulfilled, or the Czechs refused and the excuse was offered for an attempt to impose the first.

As the press and radio campaign launched by Hitlerian Germany against Czechoslovakia waxed in fury, as the movements of the German Reichswehr grew more and more sinister on the Czechoslovak frontiers, the Sudeten Germans raised their demands. The Sudeten Germans were encouraged to believe, as they believed after the war, that the collapse of the State was imminent and therefore there was no need to come to terms with it or co-operate in its Government. Hence the rout of those parties which, since 1926, had had Ministers in the Czechoslovak Coalition Government.

Two out of three of the German ministers in the Government resigned within a fortnight of Hitler's entry into Vienna. The third, Dr. Czech, the German Socialist, resigned shortly afterwards, though for slightly different reasons. The German Agrarian and Christian Socialist (Catholic) Parties went over completely to the Henlein Party, the German Socialists remained in semi-collaboration with the coalition Government. Henlein declared that the membership lists of his party would be closed on May 31st, and the Sudeten Germans rushed to join the party in thousands.

Nobody who has not lived among Germans in the heat of political excitement can understand the collapse of the German democratic parties through the years

1933 onwards, and above all since the annexation of Austria. Partly it is due to the fascination of power and victory and the natural desire to be on the winning side; partly to fear provoked by the terrorism and brutality of the Nazi majority, but most of all to the conviction which has been forced upon every German that "German" means "Nazi" and "Nazi" means "German" and both mean the end of Czechoslovakia. Among the Sudeten Germans who are, racially, the least pure of all Germans, practically all having Czech blood in their veins, this final proof that they were "Germans" was vigorously exploited and the ranks of the Henlein party swelled daily. Those who did not join the party were officially excommunicated, and Henlein solemnly announced that German Socialists were excluded from the "German nation."

It was only at the end of April after the Austrian Anschluss that Henlein openly declared for the first time that the party was Nazi. It was typical of the situation that he was able to do this not only over the heads of the whole party without any previous discussion except among the highest leaders, but that his doing so aroused no sort of public opposition. Those who joined him in 1933 when he "accepted the fundamental demands of democracy", renewed their allegiance in 1938, when he declared himself a Nazi.

Among other Sudeten Germans, political somersaults were still more prodigious. The Catholic leader, Senator Hilgenreiner, who was largely responsible for the wholesale surrender of the Christian Socialist Party and its incorporation with the Henlein Party, declared on April 15th, 1938:

"We have not joined a National Socialist party but a German Party which represents all views. There can be no question of a recognition of National Socialism in so far as the name means certain ethical and religious ideas."

On May 1st, Senator Hilgenreiner less than a fortnight later:

"The question which concerns us is not 'Are you a catholic, a protestant, a free thinker' but 'Are you German?' He who by blood and conviction answers this question in the affirmative recognises National Socialism."

Blood and conviction inspired much of the enormous increase in Henlein's supporters; the example of the Sudeten Germans, Seyss-Inquart, Jury, Innitzer, who had played such a prominent part in handing over Austria to the Germans; the mistakes of the Czechs, were all important factors but fear was the greatest of all. To live on as a non-Nazi in the Sudeten German districts was pure heroism. Moral and economic terrorism was raging. Anyone who did not acknowledge Hitler as leader of all the Germans was a 'national traitor' and treated with brutality and ostentatious contempt on every occasion. Employers either refused of their own free will to employ anybody who had not

Henlein Party card or were warned with wholesale boycott if they did so. Shops refused to sell except to Henleinists. The children of non-Nazi parents were persecuted at school not only by other children but by the teachers. Men and women are openly threatened with worse reprisals when *der Tag kommt* and so great was the atmosphere of exhilaration and despair in the Sudeten German districts that it was hard to believe that "the day" would not come. If, in fact, "the day" should come, it was known that lists had been prepared by the youths of the Henlein party and that every man, woman and child on those lists would suffer for their refusal to join Henlein in his fight against the Czechs.

The state of affairs in the Sudeten German districts after the invasion of Austria was shocking and the excesses of emotion and intimidation scarcely civilised.

During election times pictures of Henlein were framed in windows with evergreens and candles round them like ikons. Women broke through the crowd and kissed the handles of Henlein's car (which had been given him by the representatives of German heavy industry). In Warnsdorff there was a bed which Henlein once slept in which had been carefully preserved in the condition in which Henlein left it, even to the unchanged sheets. This bed was exhibited to the faithful and allowed to be touched by the worthy. Suicide rates have always been higher among the Sudeten Germans than among any other people in Europe and it was easy for anyone travelling through these districts after the Anschluss to believe this. The mental unbalance and hysteria were appalling and they were deliberately exaggerated by the Henleinists and by Nazi agents from Germany.

The terrorisation of the Sudeten German districts reached a pitch which hitherto the Nazis had only permitted themselves within their own frontiers and in the Saar during the plebiscite in 1934-5. It was unbelievable that such pressure could ever be exercised in a democratic State such as Czechoslovakia. permitted themselves within their own frontiers. It was unbelievable that such pressure could ever be exercised in a democratic State such as Czechoslovakia. In vain the German Socialists appealed in Parliament, in the press, in the Ministry of Interior, for protection from the Henlein terror. The Czechs had orders to resist all provocation, to shut their eyes to all the Henlein activities which did not impair the military safety of the State. Even the Czech police failed to protect the Sudeten German democrats and more than once threatened socialists were advised to move away from the district because the police could not guarantee their safety. On May 12th Jaksch, the Social Democratic leader, declared in Parliament that "the authority of the State is completely undermined."

Czechoslovakia was threatened with internal collapse, not because the Czechs could not keep order if they chose, but because they had orders to refrain from doing so. The British, the French, and a large number of the Czechs themselves, urged the Czechoslovak Government to shut their eyes to all provocation, to govern with as light a hand as possible, to make every possible effort to avoid anything approaching an incident or anything which Germany could use as an excuse for attacking Czechoslovakia. More farsighted and courageous Czechs, however, urged that this was a far more dangerous policy than one which maintained order and the strong control by the Czechs of their own frontier districts. If the Nazi Government wanted an excuse for an attack it would soon find one, they argued, and in the collapse of the authority of the State it would find the best excuse it could hope for. The Czech Liberal, Catholic and Socialist Parties pressed for stronger action against the open provocation of the Henlein party; the Agrarians, in whose hands was the Ministry of the Interior and most of the police, were timid in the extreme. The situation throughout the Republic deteriorated before their eyes.

But though the Czech nation as a whole was determined to try and reach agreement with the Germans, it was also, in the last resort, determined to defend itself; there were serious disagreements, however, between the parties as to the tactics to be pursued in bringing about a settlement with Germany and with the Sudeten Germans. There were even, it must be admitted, nervous persons among the Czechs as there are among the British and the French, who would have sold their countries' freedom at an appropriate price. There were unsavoury calculations in the minds of some of the Right-Wing Agrarians; for though the agricultural interest as a whole would suffer from any economic subservience of Czechoslovakia to Germany there were, as we have seen, certain monopoly

interests which could hope for material advantage if they sold out politically to the Germans. There were dangerous influences, as has been mentioned, at work in the Živnostenská Banka, the largest Czech (Agrarian) Bank which controls some 35 per cent of Czech industry.

But, on the whole, the real enemy within the gates was the sheer defeatism which the Nazis were deliberately creating. Czechs pointed to the map and saw Germany surrounding them on three sides. They heard Chamberlain in London refuse to give the French an assurance that Britain would support her in Central Europe. They watched the French join with the British in bringing pressure to bear on their Government to go "to the utmost limit of possibility." They read Bartélemy in the *Temps* arguing that France was not really committed after all to the defence of Czechoslovakia. They watched England ratify with indecent haste Austria's union with Germany. They heard Lords, Archbishops and commoners frequently declare that we should all be glad that the Austrians had surrendered without a fight.

The Czech defeatists are not as cowardly as some, and those of the Czechs who are ready to give in, know that they themselves must pay the price. Theirs is not the calculation of a certain British school of thought which advocates handing others over to the Nazis in order that Britain should remain safe and rich.

The Czechs, if they are ready to fight for their own freedom, can avoid being handed over to the Nazis since it is clear that the British would neither impose a settlement themselves nor probably, when it actually came to the point, allow it to be imposed by Germany at the point of the sword. But the British Government has allowed, and even, in effect, if not in motive, encouraged the severest Nazi pressure on Prague and it was this which the Czechs had to resist if they were to escape with their independence.

For six months the Czechs have held out under the most appalling pressure and terrorisation. It is only national unity and patriotism which made this possible.

But the Czechs, though they are patriots, are also democrats and they proceeded to try and settle the conflict by discussion and negotiation and renounced, till the last possible moment, the use of force.

The Czechoslovak Government is a Coalition Government of six parties from the extreme Conservatism of the Agrarians through the Catholic Clericals, to the Liberal National Socialists and the Social Democrats. To the Right-Wing Agrarians Henlein was just a German and the question was a purely national one. To the Catholics, Liberals and Socialists, he was a Nazi, that is, the bitter enemy—if he were given a free hand in the Sudeten German districts—of catholicism, liberalism and socialism. Their resistance to his demands was not, therefore, a purely national resistance but one which transcended national divisions and was a policy supported equally by Germans of similar views.

Those who in the earlier days had pressed for a more liberal nationality policy now opposed too great concessions on the same grounds which they had formerly pressed for them; whereas the earlier nationalists, now convinced that their chauvinist policy had failed, were ready to sacrifice non-national ideals for the sake of national quiet.

All parties were, however, convinced that far-reaching concessions were necessary and that Henlein must be encouraged to formulate his demands once and for all in black and white. Many of the Agrarians believed that Henlein should be encouraged to come into the Government, thinking that once he was given actual responsibility, he would moderate his demands and become less radical. Others, however, realised that since Henlein was not a free agent but the agent of the Third Reich, his entry into the Government would be like the entry

of Seyss-Inquart into the Austrian Government—the prelude to the subjugation of Czechoslovakia. Most parties agreed that Municipal Elections which were due should be held. Then, it was argued, the situation in the Czechoslovak as in the German camp would be clearer, and the solution of the nationality problem would approximate nearer to the views of the country as expressed in the elections. Others feared, however, that elections would be treated as a plebiscite by the Germans, and by this time, it was obvious to the meanest intelligence that a plebiscite under those conditions of tension and terror, would be a parody of democratic rights, unequalled outside the bounds of the totalitarian states. For a while after the Anschluss all political meetings were banned. The Henlein Party made violent protests and demanded that the ban should be removed and the Municipal Elections should be held.

In April the Czechoslovak Government conceded to this demand. A widespread political amnesty was declared for Easter, May 1st meetings were permitted and it was agreed to hold the elections on two Sundays in May and one in June. In a speech on March 28th, Dr. Hodža, the Prime Minister, announced that a Nationality Statute would be drawn up for the Germans and the other nationalities in the Republic. This he said would consolidate all existing laws and would go a long way to satisfy the legitimate wishes of the minorities:

“We are entering a new phase of our minority policy,” he went on; “every minority settlement in Czechoslovakia is based on firm conditions such as the Czechoslovak constitution. . . . All Czechoslovak citizens are protected by the State and Government whatever part of the Republic they may live in. The Government will in no form admit any pressure, either economic, moral or political. We are entitled to say that in Czechoslovakia we have formed the most relatively perfect system of minority laws.”

The statement about the pressure was, as we have seen, unfortunately not a true account of the situation, and inadequate protection was given to the German Socialists in their last heroic stand. But it was an undertaking by the Czechoslovak Government which should be carefully observed and one which does not permit accession to Henlein's full demands since these include a demand that the "German national group" shall have full control over its own affairs; in other words that the German majority shall dispose as it thinks fit of the German minority. What Nazis think fit has been seen in Austria and Germany.

Dr. Hodža called attention to Mr. Chamberlain's speech of March 24th. In this speech Mr. Chamberlain "observed with satisfaction that the Government of Czechoslovakia are addressing themselves to the practical steps that can be taken within the framework of the constitution to meet the reasonable wishes of the German minority!" The Henlein party proceeded to make it quite plain that a settlement "within the framework of the constitution" was not what they wanted. Their demand during the last year has been for "autonomy," though what exactly this meant even they themselves did not at first know. It was not till they negotiated with the Czechoslovak Government in May, June and July that it became known. These negotiations were of a complicated administrative character, extremely intricate and extremely delicate; and they were accompanied by a blazoning of trumpets and threats by the German press, by mutual recrimination between Czechs and Germans and by protestations that neither side seriously intended an "agreement." Since, as *The Times* put it, the Czechoslovak Government was in fact attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable, failure was practically inevitable.

At first neither the Czechs nor the Germans knew exactly what was meant by the settlement. The Czechs realised that their country was threatened and were determined to do nothing which would make its position

more precarious. The Sudeten Germans realised that the international situation was acute and that they could turn everyone's horror of war to their own advantage. They therefore talked wildly. Henlein's spokesmen speculated on war and the fear of war and openly declared that "they would give the Czechs a time limit within which to come to terms." One Henlein man said that "it was all a matter of arranging a scenario." Henlein and Hitler proceeded to do this.

At the end of April, Henlein made a notorious speech at Carlsbad in which he outlined the demands of the Sudeten German party.<sup>1</sup>

These demands were amplified in a memorandum which was submitted to the Czechoslovak Government on June 7th. (The text which was given in *The Times* for July 20th will be found in the appendix.) On September 4th, a Sudeten Nazi leader declared:

"No compromise is possible because these demands are only the beginning of the settlement. They are not the last demands but only the first that the Sudeten Germans will make. What is more, the Sudeten Germans are no longer alone in the fight. They have 76,000,000 Germans behind them."

On September 5th, the Henlein Party declared officially it would accept nothing less.

<sup>1</sup> This speech can be obtained from the publishers in English in a very tasty little booklet on the cover of which is a large map showing in blue the German areas of Europe—all, that is except the South Tyrol, over which is a white label bearing the publisher's name. In a foreword by "The Publishers," the most important of whom is K. H. Frank, commonly said to be the most extremist of Henlein's lieutenants, occurs the following passage:—

"The problem of Czechoslovakia, although the most striking and important, is but one aspect of a far greater question: how to combine national feeling and political loyalty. The different Central European peoples want to keep their own racial, cultural and linguistic traits and character; so for instance, the Germans of the Sudeten districts declared themselves to belong to the great cultural and spiritual union of all Germans. This feeling is natural and *does in itself lead in no way to illoyalty to the State.*"

"The legal order of the State," said Henlein at Carlsbad on 24th April, 1938, "has to be reconstructed on the following lines:—

- (1) full equality of status between Czechs and Germans.
- (2) recognition of the Sudeten German ethnic group as a legal personality.
- (3) determination and legal recognition of the German territory.
- (4) full self-government for the German territory, comprising all spheres of public life, in so far as the interests of the Germans are concerned.
- (5) legal protection for every citizen living outside the territory of his own nationality.
- (6) the removal and reparation of all injustices committed since 1918.
- (7) recognition of the principle that there should be only German officials in German areas.
- (8) full liberty to confess German nationality and German political philosophy (national socialism).

Threefold revision—revision of the historical myth of the Czech race;  
revision of the aim to make of Czechoslovakia a bulwark against the Germans;  
revision of Czechoslovak foreign policy."

In other words the Sudeten Germans were demanding (4) and (5), the partition of Czechoslovakia into German and Czech areas—this we have shown to be impossible. Germans and Czechs live for the most part in the same districts; so that either a large Czech minority would be incorporated within the German districts and the protection of its rights would appear as an infringement of the German right of self-government, or else only 90-100 per cent German districts would be autonomous and this would cause insoluble administrative difficulties as well as again including a German minority in

Czech districts. Herr Vollner's solution, speaking in the name of his party on September 4th, was the wholesale expulsion of the Czechs from their own frontier districts. Henlein's original solution was contained in points (2) and (5). The acceptance of point (2) would mean that all non-Nazi Germans were subjected to the Nazis unless a special qualifying clause was put in which obviated clause (8). Point (6) meant the undoing of all legal commercial transactions since 1918 since Sudeten Germans who had sold their land, or their factories could claim to have done so on the grounds that the economic power of the State was unjustly transferred into Czech hands and not, as we have seen, by the natural process of developing new regions, of building new factories in the interior of the country where labour was cheaper and taxation less.

It was impossible for the Czechs to concede these demands in full and they were formulated in a tone designed to intimidate rather than conciliate the Czechs. They made effective negotiation practically impossible, and in London as well as in Prague these demands were regarded as unacceptable. By September, however, the British were pressing the Czechs to accept all but point (8). This was the measure of Nazi intimidation and made a farce of the patient efforts of negotiation which the Czechs had loyally pursued.

In April, the Carlsbad demands were regarded as a possible basis of discussion and were in fact treated as such. Certain of them were acceptable without further discussion, such as point (1) which meant, if it meant anything, that the Germans were no longer to be regarded as a "minority" but as a "nationality," and (7) which was an enlargement of the principle of proportionality agreed to in the February 1937 Agreement between the Activists and the Government. Furthermore the Czech parties were all agreed that a large measure of decentralisation must take place;

that the local police should be in the hands of the Sudeten Germans though the State police (gendarmerie) must remain in the hands of the Central Government; that there should be a new administrative system based on a division of local government into lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and Ruthenia), provinces and districts; that there should be provincial diets, and that these should have executive as well as administrative powers. Local government, it was agreed, should pass more and more into the hands of the local population, whether this was Czechoslovak, Polish, Hungarian or German.

Decentralisation was obviously a desirable measure, but one holding very great danger for the coherence and continuation of the Czechoslovak State. Of this the Nazis were perfectly aware. It is only necessary to compare Hitler's own estimate of the policy which pre-War Austria should have pursued in comparable circumstances *Mein Kampf*; (English edition, p. 39):

“If the struggle to maintain this State was to be taken up seriously and fought to a finish, ruthless and consistent centralisation alone could attain the object. Homogeneity in form must be expressed by establishment in principle of a unified State language, and the technical instrument for this had to be forced into the hands of the administration, for without it a unified State could not endure. The only way, moreover, of producing uniform and permanent State consciousness was through the schools and education. It could not be achieved in ten or twenty years . . . ”

The Sudeten Germans had their own schools, were being conceded full equality of their language with the language of the State and were now claiming, with a fair prospect of achieving it in large measure, the control of the frontier districts of the State. If the frontier districts were to be given largely to the Nazis, it

would be impossible either to protect the non-Nazi Germans or to maintain the inner cohesion of a State which was organised in the interior as a democracy and on the fringes as Nazi and totalitarian. It would be harder than ever to uphold the State frontiers between Germany and Czechoslovakia if they became in fact mere divisions between one group of German Nazis and another. It was obvious that the Sudeten Germans, once local power was in their hands, would do their utmost to expel the Czechs from the frontier districts, to "liquidate" the German Democrats, and to approximate the political and cultural systems on both sides of the frontier to the same Nazi level. In other words, to all intents and purposes Henlein merely demanded that the union of the Sudeten German districts with the German ones should take place slowly. The Czechs would first delegate their authority to the Sudeten Germans and later the Germans would dispose of it as they chose. How they would choose was shown by their other demands, one of which was that the Czechs should renounce their alliances and expose themselves to the full force of German pressure. Henlein spoke of his demands as those of the "German people," and exhorted Czech statesmen to correct "that unhappy opinion, that it is the particular task of the Czech people to form the bulwark against the so-called *Drang nach Osten*."

In other words, the Czechs were to give up the conditions of their independence and submit to a Germany inspired with racial principles according to which all Slavs are "sub-German," and are only of any value when led by Germans. Their new subjection would be considerably worse than that which they had suffered for 300 years under the Austrian Hapsburgs and against which they had less than twenty years ago successfully revolted. In place of the catholicism of the Hapsburgs which offended the Hussite Czechs, was to be put the Nazi doctrines of present-day Germany

which contradict all the ideals of humanity and freedom for which the Czechs have fought.

Henlein's sudden enunciation of Nazi principles at Carlsbad in April, 1938, raised a difficult political problem. The Sudeten German Nazi Party was, as we have seen, banned in 1933. Henlein had all along sworn that his party was quite a different pair of shoes. Should he not now be arrested as Krebs and Jung were arrested in 1933 for being the leaders of a banned party? In justice he certainly should have been and if Czechoslovakia were of equal size with Germany, he certainly would have been arrested—if indeed in those circumstances he would have dared make this declaration. But the liberty which Great Powers allow themselves to dispose of the lives and freedom of their subjects is not shared by Small Powers and Henlein was left untouched. To arrest Henlein would have been accounted "provocation" by Great Britain and France as well as by Germany. Henlein's own action was apparently not regarded as provocation and a few weeks later he was invited to this country.

Exactly who was responsible for Henlein's London visit is uncertain, but it is not likely that the "spokesman of the German people" in Czechoslovakia would have come to this country without at least the consent of the greater Leader in Berchtesgaden. The curious part of Henlein's visit was that he only saw members of Parliament credited with anti-Nazi sentiments. To these he declared that he was not really a Nazi, that he did not really mean to have his Carlsbad demands or nothing, but that he was a "moderate" whose terms the English would do well to support and the Czechs to agree to because otherwise "worse might come after."

It is true that Henlein's relations with Hitler are not good, but this makes him less than ever able to frame his own policy. For the great majority of his followers support him only as the representative of Hitler. Since Hitler fairly plainly does not trust him, and relies more on

the emigré Sudeten Nazi, Krebs, Henlein is completely unable, when his views differ from Hitler's, to impress them upon the Führer. In actual fact, therefore, it is of no importance at all what Herr Henlein's private views may be since his public Nazi views are those which count in the Sudeten German districts, and even to his own lieutenants he dare not repeat what he said in London.

The question still remains, however, whether the purpose of Henlein's visit was to impress Henlein with the anti-Nazi British, or the British with the anti-Nazi Henlein. Unfortunately, it appears that it was the latter which actually occurred and many anti-Nazis in this country were temporarily convinced that to support Henlein was to cheat Berlin. One purpose of a lunch arranged for Henlein with Mr. Winston Churchill was, it was said, in order that Mr. Churchill should give him a proper fright. Exactly how big a fright Mr. Churchill gave him was shown by the events of the following week-end. On May 19th Henlein left Czechoslovakia for Germany where it is believed he had an interview with Hitler and reported on the situation in England.

## CHAPTER XII

MAY 21ST

ON Saturday, May 21st, the British Ambassador in Berlin was said to be of the opinion that Germany intended to march into Czechoslovakia that night. The crisis which broke that week-end had been brewing for a considerable time. German troop movements on the Czechoslovak border started early in April. In reply to enquiries, the Czechs were told by the Nazi authorities that there were no movements taking place and the British, that these movements were purely routine. In the second half of April, the concentrations on the Czechoslovak border had reached a considerable size. It was ascertained that regiments had been moved from twelve garrisons in different parts of Germany and that they were hidden in the woods on the Czechoslovak frontier.

The Czechoslovak General Staff knew every movement, and at the beginning of the second week of May urged the mobilisation of the Czechoslovak Army. The political leaders refused. It was known that the German troops were not all round the Czechoslovak borders but only in Bavaria and Saxony, opposite the most populous Sudeten German districts. For this reason, the political leaders of Czechoslovakia believed that the concentration of troops was a political measure designed to influence the Sudeten Germans in the elections which were taking place on the 22nd May, and not a military measure against the Czechoslovak State.

On the 18th, 19th and 20th, however, more information came in which was reported by the Secret Service of more than one country. Material was being concentrated and troops moved in Saxony; 500 aeroplanes

were concealed in the Bohemian Forest area; four motorised divisions were said to be concentrated under the command of General von Reichenau in the neighbourhood of the Czechoslovak frontier. It was patent that the basis for a considerable military action had been prepared and though the actual concentration itself was inconsiderable, advance parties from a number of divisions were present in the neighbourhood of the German-Czechoslovak frontier.

On Friday, the 20th, at 3.0 p.m., a cabinet meeting was called in Prague at which the Army leaders were present. They again pressed for the mobilisation of the entire Army. Partial mobilisations are always unpopular with the General Staff both for technical reasons and because they involve a certain risk, being a political measure intended to call a bluff rather than a military measure intended to resist an attack. The Czechoslovak Government persisted in thinking that the German intentions were political rather than military, but the situation in the Sudeten German regions did not permit the taking of risks.

On Sunday, May 23rd, the Municipal Elections were being held in many Sudeten German regions. Excitement had reached a dangerous pitch, and serious incidents were reported. Provocative acts by Sudeten German Nazis which the police had orders to ignore in order to avoid "incidents" and not provoke Germany, had reached unheard-of limits and the Czech population, seeing that the police took no measures to stop it, were beginning to take the law into their own hands. Nazi provocation was carried into the centre of the country. In the main streets of Prague bands of boys patrolled in white stockings raising their hands in the Hitler salute (now called the "German greeting"). In a restaurant a boy offered German marks as currency, and when it was refused pocketed it with the remark, "You'll be taking it soon."

A form of storm troops had been organised by the

Henleinists and it was calculated that near on 20,000 Sudeten Germans had been given work in Germany. A Sudeten German Legion, like that formed from the Austrian Nazis before the annexation, was organised. The general game seemed to be to play on the Czechs' nerves and to prepare the scenario spoken of. In Prague and Brünn (the capital of Moravia) it came to hand to hand fighting between Czechs and Germans and the police had to be called in.

In the Sudeten German districts the situation was considerably worse. It was openly whispered that Hitler was coming that Sunday. Nazi flags had been smuggled across the border. Everything had been done, as was done on the eve of the Saar plebiscite, to give the appearance of a *fait accompli*, to give the hesitating Germans the impression that the game was up and their best security was in voting 100 per cent Nazi. Everything was done to make the population believe that Hitler was coming that Sunday, but those responsible may or may not have believed that this in fact was the case. In some towns later evidence was forthcoming that actual arrangements had been made to receive him. In certain post offices near the frontier customers were warned not to buy too many stamps since they would be out of date on the Sunday, but since Hitler's approach is heralded for 9 Sundays out of 10, no doubt this warning is issued by Nazis every Friday. There was more serious evidence in the notices which recalled servant girls working in Prague to their Sudeten German homes, but all of this is more or less hearsay and gossip. The decisive element in the situation was that the Sudeten Germans were prodigiously excited and in that state of jangled nerves a more or less serious incident might easily occur. Sudeten German leaders had privately declared that they would not hesitate to call in the German troops if "matters went too far" and the Czechs were taking no risks.

After a long debate, therefore, the Czechoslovak Government decided to call up one class of the reserves—which is about (officially) 90,000 men, together with the specialists from all classes, the machine-gunners and heavy artillery, the anti-aircraft gunners, the tank drivers, the airmen, etc., numbering (officially) some 84,000. The decision was reached by about 8 p.m. Shortly before 9 p.m. the orders went out. The ordinary reserves were told to report within 12 hours, the specialists were given 24 hours. The orders were delivered in the villages all over the Republic soon after 10 p.m., by which time the villagers were mostly asleep. The soldiers obeyed immediately, most believing that the war had started. By 3 a.m., some 70 per cent of them were in their places and the frontier posts fully held. By breakfast the next day not only the ordinary reserve but all the specialists had reported. Out of 174,000 men, 16 failed to turn up. In the German mobilisation for the invasion of Austria, it was reported that 20 per cent refused.

The efficiency of the Czechoslovak mobilisation surprised even the Czechs. Each garrison moved up, relieving the one ahead with clock-like precision. The rapidity with which the frontiers were manned was remarkable. Within 12 hours every one of the roads, bridges and railways leading across the frontiers was guarded. Barricades were erected in the streets of Sudeten German towns near the frontiers and the German population itself assisted in building them; not Nazis of course—in spite of Herr Frank's statement that German national feeling “does in itself lead in no way to disloyalty to the State”—but Socialists, Communists and all the elements who believe that the first duty of a citizen is to defend his country.

The effect of the mobilisation was miraculous. Provocation instantly ceased, for a few days even the white stockings of the Nazis disappeared from the streets, and party emblems were removed. The presence of

the troops in the frontier districts immediately restored order. Twenty-four hours later the elections were held in perfect calm. There were no election incidents. For the first time since the Anschluss, non-Nazi Germans felt a certain amount of security under the protection of the Czechoslovak Army. The mere presence of the soldiers restored the authority of the State which the inactivity of the police had slowly undermined. And seeing the young soldiers go past to the frontier, seeing them billeted in their own towns and villages, made many Sudeten Germans realise for the first time that war between Germany and Czechoslovakia would be fought out in the heavily populated Sudeten German districts.

The division between German and German was accentuated that week-end in one respect. The German democrats cheered the troops moving up to the frontier and felt secure while they were advancing and feared their retreat. The Nazis awaited the retreat with impatience and expected the arrival of the Reichswehr. One story was told of a Czech regiment passing through a village at night in a West to East direction away from the German border. A Sudeten German Nazi, mistaking them for Germans telephoned to the next village, which turned out with swastikas to greet them. A similar story was told from Komotau. The director of a water pump was called up in the middle of the night to "meet the army" and is said to have arrived in his Nazi Brown Shirt. The effect on the Czech troops can be imagined. A similar mistake made by the Czechs in the last war cost every tenth man his life. The Czechs who had experienced the penalty of desertion were not very tolerant.

The effect of the mobilisation on the Czechs themselves was no less than its effect on the Sudeten Germans. Defeatism was absolutely routed and after that weekend no leader would have dared to breathe a word about "terms." The Czech population had been called out to defend their country and there was no question of

them not doing so—if it was necessary. In a sense, it was almost a relief. They had lived under the shadow of war for the last two years—a shadow which had darkened every day during the last two months. The hardest thing of all in that situation was to keep their nerves; it was a relief actually to be called upon to take action, even if that action may mean war and the risk of death. More than that, the Czech leaders suddenly saw what the people were really like and realised that the whole country was behind them if it came to fighting for their independence. The mobilisation was, in a sense, a vote of confidence and the Czechoslovak people responded with a spontaneous and unfaked 100 per cent "Yes."

Important as the events of that week-end were for the Czechoslovak internal situation, their significance for the international situation was even greater. For the first time in their history, the Dictators' threat of force had been answered by another threat of force—a threat far weaker, but one which said, "All right, come on and take it!" It is essential to remember that in all the foreign coups Hitler has made, not one single shot has been fired (June 30th, 1934, when Hitler ordered his own comrades to be shot, is the only occasion on which shots were fired). As Madame Tabouis wrote,<sup>1</sup> Hitler has achieved every single foreign success, not by force, but by the threat of force. For the first time the threat of a lightning attack had been countered by a lightning defence. Europe held its breath. "Would the Nazis capitulate?" They did but it was a near thing. Why they did, few yet know for certain.

It may have been the Czechoslovak determination, if necessary, to fight which took them by surprise; its efficiency was undoubtedly alarming to a country whose own mobilisation and invasion of Austria had been, from all military accounts, a military disgrace. The tanks broke down on the roads, there was not enough petrol at the aerodromes for flares, the field

<sup>1</sup>*Blackmail or War*, by Mme. Tabouis (Penguin Books, 6d.)

kitchens got left behind, lorries had to be requisitioned *en route*.

It may have been the British warning in Berlin and London that Germany could not count on British neutrality, but why did the British Government give this warning? On the Friday exact information reached London that the Germans were planning operations on the Czechoslovak frontier. The British Ambassador was told to call at the German Foreign Office and demand the meaning. He was told by Baron von Weiszäcker that these were purely routine movements of the German Army. Early on the Saturday morning, he again called on the German Foreign Office and this time saw Ribbentrop, who had been away on the previous day. Ribbentrop gave the same explanation and furiously attacked the Czechs for having mobilised. London was far from satisfied and exceedingly alarmed. The situation was critical. The Czechs had already mobilised, the French were threatening to do so. Everything was prepared for military operations on a vast scale. The basis was there: everything depended on the German decision to utilise it or withdraw. Our Ambassador was again instructed to call on the German Foreign Office (in all he called seven times during the crisis). Meanwhile Ribbentrop had spoken with Hitler who, from all accounts, was very much excited. Ribbentrop himself by this time was livid, and appears not to have been wholly in control of himself and even to have said very regrettable things to the diplomatic representatives of Great Britain, France and Czechoslovakia. On Saturday evening, May 21st, the situation was tense. Lord Halifax received the German Ambassador, Herr Dircksen, and is said to have made it quite clear to him that a German-Czech war meant sooner or later an Anglo-German war. The British Ambassador in Berlin was instructed to remind the German Government immediately of Mr. Chamberlain's speech on March 24th and to intimate to the

Germans that we had information that the French intended to march if the Germans attacked, and that we marched with them. The British Ambassador was convinced that the Germans would attack that night.

The situation looked so critical in Berlin that many people decided to leave. The German railways—the story now goes—in view of the large number of British residents who appeared suddenly to have decided to take a holiday, offered to put on a special coach. Some bright Nazi immediately decided that this was the exodus of British women and children which would obviously precede Anglo-German hostilities. Some people maintain that it was this action which prevented war by convincing the German Government that we meant business. In fact, it appears, that the British Ambassador was so alarmed at this interpretation being put upon the train episode, that he immediately ordered the women and children to stay where they were.

Many people, Göring and Ribbentrop among them, it is said, held that the British Government was bluffing and Ribbentrop, after his very special experiences as German Ambassador in London, is reported to have said he knew how flabby the English were. From one point of view the whole episode of the train was not a disproof of Ribbentrop's opinion, but the Germans who were calculating in terms of advancing to frontiers and mobilising reserves, no doubt confused the actual direction in which the train was heading and decided it meant advance rather than retreat on the part of the British.

But even this supposed resolution on the part of Great Britain did not really carry the field, and Europe was certainly very near to war for several days. The serious incident which had been feared in the Sudeten German districts had actually occurred on the Friday night. Sudeten Germans travelling late at night on a motor-bicycle not far from the German frontier were challenged by a Czech policeman. They refused to stop. According

to the official story the policeman fired at their tyres. They were descending a hill, one bullet killed both men.

According to the statement made by Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons on May 23rd, "The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister informed the German Minister of this incident and told him that disciplinary measures would be taken against those responsible." Exactly why the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister had to inform the German Minister of the death of two Sudeten German subjects of Czechoslovakia is uncertain, nor was the subsequent action of the German Government quite in accordance with diplomatic procedure. The German Government demanded that the two Germans be given military honours. It informed the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister that Herr Hitler himself intended sending a wreath and would instruct, with the permission of the Czechoslovak Government, his military attaché in Prague to attend the funeral in person.

After a twenty-four hour delay, the Czechs consented to a public funeral for the two Sudeten Germans, shot by a Czech policeman in the course of somewhat overzealous duty, and gave the German Government permission to pay what honours it chose to the two men. A huge wreath was accordingly sent from Adolf Hitler, and the German military and air attachés attended the funeral. The day of the funeral passed off without event. The Czechs took the precaution of removing all their police from the neighbourhood and leaving in the hands of the Sudeten Germans themselves responsibility for the maintenance of peace and order.

The funeral was the biggest pan-German demonstration ever staged on foreign soil. It was nothing more nor less than an anti-Czech demonstration on Czechoslovak territory under the ægis of the German military attaché and a wreath from Adolf Hitler. It was the Sudeten and Reich German answer to the Czech mobilisation. Its aim, successfully achieved, was to

encourage the Germans after their heavy defeat to remind the Czechs that the terror had not ceased. And, in fact, after the funeral, conditions returned to normal—that is, to provocation and terrorisation.

From the point of view of the internal situation, the funeral was a grave mistake. The Czechs had again been flouted on a giant scale not only by the Sudeten Germans but by the Reich Nazis themselves on Czech soil. The Sudeten German Nazis picked up their courage. Henlein, who, interestingly enough, had been in Germany throughout the entire crisis and had left Prague on the Friday morning with the declaration that he refused to negotiate with the Czechoslovak Government "till order was restored," returned post-haste on the Monday and went straight to Dr. Hodža that afternoon. Discussions between the Henlein party and the Government which had been held up, were immediately started. After the funeral, however, though "informative conversations" were continued, Henlein made a bolder statement. There were, he said, to an English newspaper correspondent, Mr. Ward Price (*Daily Mail*, May 26th, 1938), three alternative solutions for the Sudeten Germans. The first was to give them everything they asked for. The second was to let them have a plebiscite for and against joining with Germany, and the third was to have a war, which last would, after all, "be simpler still."

This interview created a considerable stir. The Czech Government banned it because, had the Czech public been told that this was the man they were "negotiating" with, they would have demanded an instant breaking off of negotiations and Henlein's arrest as a traitor to the State. The official German news agency banned it for slightly different reasons. Finally on the instructions of Berlin, Henlein denied having given it. The alleged interview was, the Henlein Party said, "the free and unauthorised rendering of a talk." Mr. Ward Price very properly protested and Henlein wrote him a letter

(published in the *Daily Mail*, June 10th). "I regret," he wrote, "that the mutual interest of our talk led on, through a long discussion of the concrete problems of the moment, to a survey of the theoretically possible development of the Sudeten German question."

The German denial of this interview was interesting and showed that Germany was already pursuing new tactics.

For six whole days, however, it had been touch and go whether Europe was to be plunged in war. The decision to maintain the peace was finally reached only on Wednesday the 25th. On that day, the story goes, a secret Cabinet meeting was held in Germany at which not only representatives of the Army but of heavy industry were also present. The matter under discussion was an attack on Czechoslovakia. The Party leaders were, it appears, restrained by the conservative elements in industry and the Army. Herr Hitler himself declared that he was not going to risk the Third Reich for the sake of 3½ million Sudeten Germans. The Third Reich was a somewhat higher price than the "bones of a Pomeranian soldier," but it was still the old calculation. In his speech in July, M. Daladier paid a tribute to Herr Hitler's part in saving the peace during that crisis. "Do they call virtue there ungratefulness."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE POWERS AND THE CRISIS

THE effect of the crisis of May 21st was salutary but short-lived. It was a break in the clouds of the Nazi attempt to terrorise Europe. The real balance of forces in Europe was revealed. For one brief hour the Nazis were beaten at their own game of bluff and blackmail, and they retired. The "disorderly, expostulating and embarrassed states" pulled themselves together on the slope.

There had been considerable doubt after the annexation of Austria whether the Allies of Czechoslovakia would honour their engagements when it came to the point. The British had appeared to have been putting pressure on the French and dissuading them from firmly resisting Nazi aggression. The French, it had been put about, were busily trying to rid themselves of the Russian alliance. The Russians, it was suggested, would soon be thinking again of fixing things up with Germany. Poland and Hungary were said to have already marked out their plots in the Czechoslovak back-garden. The Rumanians and Poles would see to it that no help came to the Czechs from the East. The Czechs themselves, not unnaturally on this view, were getting ready to sell out on Germany. Prior to May 21st the whole appearance of the situation was very favourable to the Nazi Government—so favourable, indeed, that it might almost have been what the newspapers call "inspired."

During the week-end of May 21st the Czechs proved that if they were attacked they would fight even if they had to fight alone. The British took the initiative

in Berlin and told the Germans that not only the French but the British could not promise neutrality if anything occurred. The French reassured the Czechs. The Russians kept silent but the Czechs had no doubt that if anything happened the Russians would honour their commitments.<sup>1</sup> The Hungarian Ministers in Belgrade and Bucharest asked what Yugoslavia and Rumania were going to do if these events lead to war. According to the available evidence the Yugoslav Government replied that it would try to remain neutral; the Rumanian Government intimated very strongly that Rumania would certainly honour her undertaking under the Little Entente Pact.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently even Dr. Stoyadinovitch, the pro-Nazi Premier of Yugoslavia, sent word to the Czechs that Yugoslavia would immediately attack Hungary if the Hungarians moved against Czechoslovakia. Public feeling was enthusiastically pro-Czech in Yugoslavia and above all in the Yugoslav Air Force. Hungary was reserved and an article was published in a Hungarian newspaper which regretted that a "friendly Government" had mobilised troops on the Hungarian frontier. To many Hungarians it was news that the Czechs were a friendly Government. The Poles also protested against the presence of Czechoslovak troops on their frontier; but it is not altogether certain that the Poles would have refrained from occupying Teschen had any trouble occurred on the Czechoslovak-German frontier. According to a report in London, the Poles had assured the French that in the event of a conflict Poland preferred

<sup>1</sup> By the Czech-Soviet Pact of May, 1935, the Russians are committed to the military defence of Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression. This obligation does not hold, however, unless the similar obligation undertaken by France has already been fulfilled.

<sup>2</sup> By the Pact of the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia are committed to each other's defence in the event of a Hungarian attack on any one of them. This Pact, which was signed in 1922, was considerably strengthened in 1933. Since 1935, however, Yugoslavia has pursued a slightly pro-Nazi policy.

her French to her German commitments. This, however, was a red herring which the Poles and the Germans immediately chased. The truth seems to be that the French told the Poles to make up their minds which they preferred and that the Poles said they would think about it. As far as is known they are thinking about it still. Subsequent diplomatic activity of Colonel Beck in the Baltic States would seem to suggest that Poland still hoped in the event of war to preserve a strict neutrality until it was clear which side would win.

The Italian behaviour during the crisis was interesting. During the actual week-end itself, the Italians were abnormally silent. For a few days all criticism of Czechoslovakia was suspended. Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, is said to have had a stormy interview with the German Ambassador in Rome. Once the crisis was over, the Italian press resumed its aggressive tone towards Czechoslovakia. A return of the earlier attitude appeared on June 8th in the weekly review *Omnibus* (it must be remembered that the Italian press is controlled). The writer gave an account of the events of the week-end of May 21st from which, he said, it seemed clear that Germany was on the point of making war on Czechoslovakia and that she was prevented from doing so by the attitude of the British Government. For this reason the writer found that "the polemic launched by the German press accusing Great Britain of having invented the lie of German bellicose intentions was exceedingly strange."

The German press-campaign against Great Britain during the week succeeding the crisis was reassuring proof that British action had had an effective influence on the situation. The Germans accused the British of having invented the entire story or, alternatively, of having planned it with M. Daladier during the French Premier's visit to this country in April. The British attitude was said to have encouraged "the provocative

and dangerous military activity" of the Czechs, though in view of our advice to Herr Schuschnigg on a similar occasion, it is unlikely that the Czechs asked our opinion on the subject of self-defence. The British Secret Service whose sinister hand is so often detected, by the continental press, in the machinations of free-masons and Jews was credited with concocting the whole story of German troop movements. The *Völkische Beobachter*, once the official organ of the Nazi party but now sharing this position with the entire press of Germany, produced the suggestion unwonted for Mr. Chamberlain that "the events of the week-end will be designated in history as a model of the most Machiavellian diplomacy which had more to do with the restoration of the prestige of the democracies as against the authoritarian states than with preventing a war."

Nazi pæans of praise for Mr. Chamberlain however were soon resumed. The democracies had come well out of a situation which required a little courage. The Czech mobilisation had proved that democracies can take, if they will, as strong and vigorous action as dictatorships. The British people, however, having been let into the secret that our Ambassador had called once or twice on the German Foreign Office in Berlin, returned to its habitual bewilderment, hardly realising that in Central Europe there was a life and death struggle in progress, to which, in the last resort, Britain herself was committed. Mr. Chamberlain made a "statement" in Parliament which used all the old jargon of "agreements," "solutions" and "settlements." British policy, to quote the Nazis, became as "sanctimonious and ambiguous" as before.

British policy towards Czechoslovakia epitomises this description.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GREAT BRITAIN AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THE lack of a constructive Central European policy has for some time been crippling British influence in Central Europe and all resistance to the Nazi penetration. At the end of 1937 the French Quai d'Orsay urged upon the British Foreign Office the necessity for a clear statement of Britain's Central European interests, and for a co-ordinated Anglo-French policy in that part of the world.

By January, 1938, the precarious situation of Austria was becoming apparent and the French repeated their earlier demand for effective action. Mr. Eden is now known to have been in favour of this, but no steps could be taken before the matter had been laid before the Cabinet. Shortly afterwards Mr. Eden resigned. His resignation was the defeat not only of his attitude towards Italy but of a general European policy. On March 7th, 1938, Mr. Chamberlain practically invited the invasion of Austria by publicly declaring: "What country in Europe to-day, if threatened by a larger one, can rely upon the League to give it protection ? None."

Germany drew her own conclusions and a few days later invaded Austria. The Anschluss was a severe shock to Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax who were brought up sharply with the realities of the situation. Foreign policy could no longer mean to Mr. Chamberlain a certain attitude to Mr. Eden but an attitude to the situation itself. Some people believe that a radical change in British foreign policy dates from that event.

Great Britain was immediately called upon again to define her policy towards Central Europe. Through the British alliance with the French and the French alliance with Czechoslovakia, the British were, to all intents and purposes, closely involved in the German-Czech conflict. If war broke out, as Mr. Chamberlain said in the House of Commons, we were almost certain to be dragged in. Would we therefore undertake a legal commitment and thereby, as Mr. Churchill pointed out, gain the full proportion of deterrent value? To do this would have been to state once and for all that settlement was only possible on the basis of respect for the integrity and independence of free nations and would have turned Germany, temporarily at last, from contemplating armed aggression. Did our refusal—repeated at the end of April when the French Premier visited this country—mean that in certain circumstances we would tolerate Nazi aggression? That we were prepared to see the Prague Government under threat of war resign its independent foreign policy, adapt itself to a German-controlled Central Europe and allow the Sudeten German Nazi Minority to have a dominating influence in the Czechoslovak State?

There was serious evidence to show this was the effect if not the aim of British policy. When the French statesmen visited this country at the end of April there was talk of "neutralising" Czechoslovakia. This, in effect, meant that Czechoslovakia must renounce her alliances with France and Russia and deal with Germany on "equal" terms. Since Germany is five times her size the effect of "neutralising" Czechoslovakia was to hand it over to German control. Those who put forward this plan were perfectly aware of this and consciously used "neutralisation" as a euphemism for "slow absorption." It appears, however, that the French refused to consider this suggestion and M Daladier expressly reaffirmed the French obligation

to defend Czechoslovakia. The British, on the other hand, expressly confirmed in April, Mr. Chamberlain's earlier statement that he could not undertake any legal commitment in Central Europe. The effect of this was to strengthen the hand of those in France who would have liked to reconsider the French alliance with Czechoslovakia. Their motive was partly fear—the attempt to buy peace from Germany at the price of the Czechs—and partly the knowledge that the whole weight of defending French security against Germany would in that event be put on the shoulders of the British. This view was given direct encouragement by the decision to enlarge the relations between our General Staffs while refusing to commit ourselves to Central Europe. The effect of this, as we have seen, was to give the impression in Prague that Czechoslovakia was increasingly isolated in the international field and should therefore make what terms she could with Germany—that is, capitulate.

Added to this indirect pressure on Prague, which took the form of weakening the position of Czechoslovakia abroad, Britain put direct pressure on the Czechoslovak Government and, what is more, persuaded the French to do so also.

On the 7th May the French and British Ministers in Prague called on the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister and urged upon him the desirability of "going to the utmost limit of possibility" in reaching an agreement with the Sudeten Germans. What exactly this meant, nobody knew, least of all the British. It may have meant that the Czechs were to accept the German view of "settlement" or it may not. In reply to questions in the House of Commons on May 16th, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs declared that no particular concessions had been suggested. He refused to give an assurance that the British Government would not press for concessions which either impaired the military defence of Czechoslovakia or acceded to the

Sudeten German demand that the foreign policy of the State should be revised.

British pressure and this refusal to define what form concessions should take did not necessarily mean that the British Government supported the full demands of the German Nazis or that it favoured a complete capitulation by Prague to Berlin. Added, however, to the apparent wish of the British Government to isolate Czechoslovakia in the international field, British intervention increased rather than diminished the precariousness of the Czechoslovak situation. Intentionally or unintentionally it served to weaken Czechoslovakia at the precise moment at which Germany was urging upon her, with the full force of intimidation, a German "dictate." The conclusion was unfortunately reached in many quarters that the British Government supported the full Nazi claims. This may have been an important factor in the German decision to force the issue on May 21st. Germany, without question, was painfully surprised by the British action that week-end which appeared to the German Government as a reversal of British foreign policy.

There are people, however, who think that British intervention in support of the Czechs on that occasion was a continuation rather than reversal of policy. According to this view, Great Britain made representations in Prague in order to be able to make representations in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> British pressure was really not on the Czechs but on the Germans. This would hardly square with the policy which virtually isolated Czechoslovakia abroad. It would square, however, with the refusal of the British Government to give a commitment to the French on the assumption that Great Britain wished to appear "impartial." It is obvious from the comment

<sup>1</sup> The only proof that in Berlin our representations were of a pro-Czech character was an article in the *Völkische Beobachter* of May 29th, which asserted that the British Government "wasted valuable time with perpetual silly questions in Berlin instead of calling Prague vigorously to order."

of the inspired German press during the crisis of May 21st that Great Britain insisted in Berlin on the "impartiality" of British policy. It was about this time that, after our suggestion of an impartial commission had been turned down by the Germans, the British Government asked the Czechs if it might appoint "observers" to go to the Sudeten German districts. "This proposal seems to originate," wrote the semi-official Nazi *Diplomatische Korrespondenz* on May 29th, "in the British desire to restore the reputation for objectivity tarnished eight days earlier. . . . Germany is no longer impressed with the argument that England is the appropriate power to take the initiative because she has no direct interests in Central Europe. . . ." By July, however, Mr. Chamberlain had apparently restored his "tarnished reputation for objectivity" and the appointment of Lord Runciman was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Nazis, if coldly by the Czechs.

The decision to send Lord Runciman to Prague as "mediator" originated with Mr. Chamberlain himself. It was first proposed to the French Government by Lord Halifax during the Royal Visit to Paris at the end of July. The British plan seems originally to have been for Anglo-French arbitrators to be appointed in Prague, though in fact, according to one well-informed source, it appears that the French Government were confronted by a *sait accomplii*. On the previous evening, Mr. Basil Newton, British Minister in Prague, had already called on the President of the Republic himself and had suggested the appointment of Lord Runciman as "arbitrator."

The function of an "arbitrator" would have been to hand to the Czechs, for acceptance or refusal, a "settlement" of their dispute with the Nazis. Refusal would have immediately put the Czechs in the wrong. Acceptance, according to the impression made by Lord Halifax on M. Bonnet, would have meant their subordination to the Nazis. Lord Halifax intimated to M. Bonnet that

the French had not been sufficiently severe in urging concession on the Czechs. He even went so far as to suggest that the French Government should have threatened Prague with a denunciation of the Franco-Czech Alliance. M. Bonnet was shaken by this apparent British desire to see the Nazis in Prague. M. Daladier took a firmer line. He strongly opposed the idea of "arbitrators" arbitrating over the heads of the Czechs, and Lord Halifax agreed to tone down his original request.

A "mediator" was therefore appointed on the grounds that this lessened the invidiousness of the Czech refusal. The French Government refused to associate itself with this new intervention in Prague; as early as June 15th it had already protested that Anglo-French intervention was merely assisting Henlein to raise his terms. The French Government consented, however, to repeat the earlier Anglo-French pressure which was managed after the visit of the French Premier and Foreign Minister to London in April, 1938.

The impression created by Lord Halifax in Paris was disturbing in itself. It was not the less disturbing because it immediately succeeded a visit to this country by Captain Wiedemann. Captain Wiedemann is the envoy of Herr Hitler. He visited this country on July 19th and had long talks with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. The exact nature of the visit was not revealed. At first it appeared as a visit of enquiry on the part of the Nazis. Ribbentrop, Hitler's chief adviser in British policy, had "gone on holiday." Dirksen, the German Ambassador in London, was going on leave. It was uncertain whether he also had fallen from favour. It seemed certain, however, that Herr Hitler was considerably perplexed by British foreign policy, and after the British action during the week-end of May 21st, he no longer had confidence in his advisers who had led him to believe that Great Britain would never risk war "for the sake of Czechoslovakia."

Captain Wiedemann's visit of enquiry, however, appears to have had a decisive influence on British Foreign policy. Lord Halifax left for Paris, and, as we have seen, intensified British pressure on the French to use their influence more strongly in Prague. Lord Halifax produced his scheme for sending Lord Runciman to Prague in order to avoid a "head-on collision." At the same time a campaign of optimism was launched in the British press and in Downing Street circles. Captain Wiedemann was reported to have brought a special message from Herr Hitler to Mr. Chamberlain. It was put about that Hitler was ready to talk about talking about an air pact, and about that old dream of the Dictators—a Four-Power directorate of Europe which, as we saw in Chapter VI, would effectively end the democratic settlement established in 1919.

It was semi-officially stated in London that once the Czech-German dispute was "out of the way," negotiations of a friendly character could start between Berlin and London.

On a wave of official optimism, Lord Runciman was sent to Prague. Among his qualifications it was pointed out "that his mind on the subject in dispute is as a white sheet." The well-known British tradition was maintained that the man most capable of solving a problem is the one who knows nothing about it. This was called impartiality. Lord Runciman was despatched to steer a middle course, like the famous Minister of religion, "between sin on the one hand and virtue on the other."

His "mission" was described in Parliament by the Prime Minister :

"Hitherto we have ourselves abstained from making suggestions as to the particular method of trying to solve this Czechoslovak question. . . . Nevertheless as time has gone on it has begun to appear doubtful whether, without some assistance from outside, a voluntary agreement could take place.

"In those circumstances his Majesty's Government have been considering whether there was any other way in which they could lend their help to bring the negotiators together, and *in response to a request from the Government of Czechoslovakia*, we have agreed to propose that a person with the necessary experience and qualities should investigate this subject on the spot and endeavour, if need be, to suggest means for bringing the negotiations to a success. Such an investigator and mediator would, of course, be independent of his Majesty's Government—in fact he would be independent of all Governments. He would act only in his personal capacity.

"Lord Runciman is not in any sense an arbitrator. He is an investigator and mediator. He is in the position of a man who goes down to assist in settling a strike. He has to see two sides who come to a point when they cannot go any further. . . . If one side declare that they will have nothing to do with him, it will be quite impossible for him to undertake the task.

"With regard to the *rumour that we were hustling the Czech Government, there is no truth in it*. Indeed the very opposite is the truth. Our anxiety has been rather that the Czechoslovak Government should be too hasty in dealing with a situation of such delicacy.

"I believe we all feel that the atmosphere is lighter (hear, hear) and that *throughout the continent there is a relaxation of that sense of tension which six months ago was present* (hear, hear)."

"Parliament dispersed amid choruses of general optimism led by the Prime Minister in one House and the Foreign Secretary in the other. If the Nation is justified in packing up for the holidays with a free heart it is not only because of Lord Runciman's devoted pilgrimage of peace to a cockpit of discords but on broader and more guarded grounds. The pilgrimage is the original and hardy idea of the Prime Minister himself" (Mr. Garvin in the *Observer*, July 21st, 1938).

Unfortunately Mr. Chamberlain in his speech had been guarded to the extent of a flagrant suppression of the facts. In the first place the Czechoslovak Government made no request for help or advice and the statements made by Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons and Lord Halifax in the House of Lords to that effect prejudiced the success of Lord Runciman's visit by their misrepresentation of the attitude of the Czechoslovak Government. In fact the Czechs strongly protested, as did the French, against the British proposal to appoint an "arbitrator." The Czechoslovak Government could not possibly, however, refuse the good offices of Lord Runciman as a "mediator." It accordingly accepted his appointment with the reserve naturally produced by renewed Anglo-French pressure on Prague. Although the history of the dispute is one of increasing Czech concessions and rising Nazi demands, the British again urged the Czechs to make further concessions to the Nazis.

Mr. Chamberlain's denial that his Government had ever "hustled the Czechs" was also unfortunate in so far as it was known to be untrue. Since March, and increasingly, the British Government had urged the Czechs to reach a swift, complete and final settlement. In the second half of July British policy veered round completely. The emphasis was put on the danger of being too hasty, on the necessity "to make a beginning," and to see about a final solution later. The whole emphasis was put on the need for *time*. Curiously enough, this change in British policy coincided with a change in the tactics of the Henlein party who, also, having accused the Czechoslovak Government of dilatoriness, started to press for time. Contrary to expectation, the six Czechoslovak Coalition Parties had managed to agree upon a far-reaching and generous settlement of the problem and the Nazis were naturally afraid of being discredited and having to assume unmistakable responsibility for a breakdown of negotiations. Lord

Runciman's appointment was therefore most welcome to the Nazi leaders in Prague and Berlin.

The third discrepancy between Mr. Chamberlain's statement and the actual facts was the representation of the situation as being less tense than it had been six weeks previously. In fact the situation was almost as critical on the day Mr. Chamberlain made his speech as it was on the day two months previously when his ambassador in Berlin reported to him that Germany might attack Czechoslovakia that night.

At the end of July reports reached the War Office of feverish military preparations in Germany. It was only when this secret information leaked out that the Nazi Government itself published details of the measures which were being taken. It was then put about that "since little or no effort has been made to disguise these preparations" they were obviously not serious or significant.

These "insignificant" measures included :

1. *The mobilisation of all Germany's reserves.*

Conscripts due for discharge on September 26th were notified that their service had been indefinitely extended. Conscripts of the classes 1910, 1911 and 1912 were called up. All men under 65 were forbidden to leave Germany and those who had served in any capacity in the Air Force were ordered to stand ready. Since the German Army now consists of 43 divisions and 4 motorised divisions and it is calculated that there are 15,000 men to a Division, the total number of the active army and the reservists was estimated at somewhere between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 men.

Although these figures must necessarily be treated with caution and accepted with reserve, not the greatest caution and the most considerable reserve can allay the legitimate apprehension of a country whose land army consists of 115,000 men with 90,000 in the British possessions. British reservists are given no annual

training "because of the expense," and men who fought in the war have not even seen the weapons which the army is now using.

## *2. The mobilisation of German labour.*

Work in the munitions factories had been accelerated so that in many factories two 10-hour shifts had become the rule. Under a special decree issued by Field Marshal Göring, men from all parts of the Reich were taken away from their regular jobs and set to work on the building of fortifications. They were set to work for the most part for a period of three months and it is estimated that this decree covered nearly half a million men. They were assembled in the large towns and despatched to secret destinations. According to a decree published on July 30th, "prohibited areas" were established along practically all the German frontiers—especially opposite Czechoslovakia, France (in what used to be before '36 the "demilitarised zone") and in East Prussia—beyond the Polish Corridor. In places, fortifications appeared to be being built 50 metres deep. No men or officers of foreign defence forces were permitted to visit or stay in these areas. German subjects above the age of fifteen had to be specially registered, and where building activity was actually in progress, notices warned trespassers that they would "be punished with immediate death."

## *3. Mobilisation of Germany's Civil Strength*

Doctors on holiday were ordered to leave their address and telephone number with the police. Several thousand young women in factories, shops and offices were instructed to register their qualifications with the police and "stand ready." Civilian property was placed by decree practically entirely at the disposal of the military authorities and this decree was liberally utilised. Motor vehicles of all sorts were commandeered, drivers requisitioned, all the holidays of railway officials were cancelled, many bus services stopped.

The aim of all this was officially said to be "to reproduce as nearly as possible in time of peace, the conditions of war." The measures themselves were described as "small manœuvres" and the alarm not unnaturally excited abroad was represented to the German people as evidence of a desire on the part of foreign countries to wage a preventive war against Germany. For their part, the Nazi leaders seemed intent upon doing everything possible to bring war about. If their mobilisations were, what they were officially stated to be—the training of reserves in the new weapons, the decision to do this on a giant scale at a time of grave international tension was a piece of unequalled irresponsibility. It could not but remind observers of Hitler's own words to the League of German Maidens in 1936:

"If I should ever want to attack an enemy, I should do it differently from Mussolini. I should not negotiate and make preparations for months. As I have always done, I should fall upon my enemy suddenly, like lightning striking out of the night."

The difference between Hitler's armies and lightning was that lightning does not need to be mobilised. The problem of secret mobilisation which had been baffling military experts for years, was overcome by a gigantic publicity campaign. It was a double bluff, equal in astuteness to Hitler's original: "very correct principle that the size of the lie is a definite factor in causing it to be believed."

It was becoming generally feared that the German plan was to hold the French at bay while they finished with Czechoslovakia. If the Nazis failed to isolate Czechoslovakia politically from Western Europe, they were preparing to do so militarily, to prevent all effective French assistance from being rendered to Czechoslovakia. Time was growing short. If the Germans could once complete their military preparations, aggressive in the

East, defensive in the West, they would avoid the necessity for another retreat in circumstances similar to those of May 21st. Time, a matter of weeks, was as essential to the German Government in July, 1938, as an immediate decision had been a few months earlier.

It was in these circumstances that the British Government also decided that the essential thing was to gain time. Lord Runciman was sent to Prague to avoid a "head-on collision." Speaking in the House of Commons, Mr. Chamberlain defined Lord Runciman's two functions as "to inform public opinion generally as to the real facts of the case" and in order that "issues which hitherto have presented great difficulty may prove under the influence of such a mediator to be less obstinate than we have thought!"

The British Government continued to insist that the issues in Czechoslovakia presented a problem of the same kind as the problems of the British Empire—something similar to a dispute between two friendly English-speaking, democratic communities. Lord Halifax, said that the solution

"is most likely to be found through the application in some form appropriate to local conditions of the principle of partnership in self-administration by which problems not totally dissimilar have been so happily resolved and that in a form which, through the contentment so brought to many different races has been the seed of greater strength to the whole community of which they are part."

It is difficult to impute to Lord Halifax and Mr. Chamberlain such utter disregard of the real issues at stake which this account of the situation would suggest, and yet to do otherwise would be to accuse them of ill-faith.

The question at issue was not ".partnership in self-administration" but whether Nazi Germany, by using the Sudeten Nazis, was to impose a certain constitution on the Czechoslovak Government which would give

her control of the internal and foreign policy of Czechoslovakia and establish a Nazi régime actually inside the country. This would in effect break down the last effective resistance to Germany in the Danube Basin, entirely cut off Eastern from Western Europe and neutralise Germany's Eastern frontier. This would mean the liberation for action in the West, if ever need should arise, of the entire military machine of Germany, strengthened and assisted by the vast Skoda works where the Czechs and the Nazis were in "partnership."

Lord Runciman was sent to Prague in order to decide this issue "impartially." "We cannot but feel that a public man of the British race and steeped in British experience and thought may have it in his power for that reason to make a contribution of quite particular value" (Halifax in the House of Lords, July 27th, 1938).

What exactly was the "contribution of quite particular value" at which British policy was aiming? Mr. Chamberlain had renounced his early isolationist policy for a policy of such strenuous intervention that even the constitutional problems of a foreign country had been brought within the competence of the British Cabinet. Great Britain is now deeply committed in Central Europe and in particular to the safety of Czechoslovakia. A "contribution of quite particular value" which does not ensure the safety of Czechoslovak democracy will now bear the stamp of betrayal upon it.

It has at last become clear that any "agreement" which the Nazis accept, except from fear of the consequences or by pressure from the overwhelming and combined forces of England, France, America, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and Roumania, will be one which hands over the Czechs, bound and helpless, to the Nazis. Such would be a plebiscite, such would be Carlsbad. Is this British policy? Has British intervention led only to this? It is difficult to find an explanation which fits all the tergiversations of British policy. All that can be said is that the effect of this

policy has been disastrous. The policy of "no commitments in Central Europe" has allowed the Central European situation to deteriorate till war is practically unavoidable. The policy of "possible intervention" has made our own participation in that war morally inescapable. The first policy, never renounced, has encouraged the Nazis to pursue their programme of aggression and to raise their terms. The second policy, simultaneously affirmed, has been too half-hearted to bring about the formation of a strong defensive alliance between Eastern and Western Europe which alone could guarantee the peace.

Our own intervention has served to weaken rather than strengthen the side on which we shall be called upon to fight if fighting occurs. We have put pressure on France to loosen her bonds with Czechoslovakia; pressure on Prague to surrender her strongest positions to the Sudeten Germans. We have put pressure on Germany not to resort to war but apparently no pressure on Germany to cease intimidating the Czechs and inciting the Sudeten Germans to rebellion. We have pressed for haste while the Czechs seemed likely to surrender; we have pressed for time while the Czechs were prepared to resist. And meanwhile the Nazis are completing their military preparations to the point at which resistance will soon be hopeless. This policy of "peace at almost any price" has brought us to the very brink of war and the Czechoslovak Republic to the edge of destruction.

Why should the British Government pursue a policy fatal to Czechoslovak democracy? In view of the existing disproportion of Czech and German strength it would seem unnecessary for the Czech allies themselves to put forward the Nazi claims, unnecessary to add British strength to that of Germany in forcing the Czechs to capitulate.

It must always be remembered that the British Government was involved in the affairs of Central Europe against

its will. The isolationist attitude which Mr. Chamberlain adopted while Mr. Eden was still in office was given a rude shock when Mr. Chamberlain discovered that not even the strictest isolationist attitude could prevent Britain from being involved in a war starting in Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were allied with the French and the French with Great Britain. Even if Mr. Chamberlain were indifferent to the fate of Czechoslovakia or of freedom in general, he could not be indifferent to the fate of France. German victory over France would be as fatal to the security of Britain to-day as it was in 1914. If France fulfilled her treaty obligations, Britain would be called upon to fulfil hers.

Therefore in the eyes of the former isolationists the only policy was one which would remove all possible occasions for war. The nature of the issues at stake meant that either the Nazi Government must give up its designs in Central Europe or the Czechs must capitulate. At all events an appeal to force which would automatically involve Great Britain must be avoided. To this end Mr. Chamberlain warned the Nazis not to resort to force by admitting in March, 1938, that the course of events might be such as to involve Great Britain in a war against Germany if Germany should attack Czechoslovakia; but simultaneously he put pressure on the Czech Government to capitulate. Pressure on Germany in March and again in April was a policy of securing a temporary peace; pressure on the Czechs a policy of securing a permanent settlement favourable to the Nazis. This may not have been the intention but was certainly the effect of British policy in the summer of 1938. In so far as they resorted only to "peaceful" methods the Nazis were practically given a free hand to instal themselves in Prague.

This double-headed policy of "impartiality," which encouraged both the Germans and the Czechs to rely upon us and therefore increased German intransigence and Czech confidence in Britain, was as apparent

in May as in March, in August and early September as in May. Once the danger of open hostilities had passed in May, 1938, British pressure on Prague Government was resumed. In the last week of May, Lord Halifax's own friends had to use all their influence to prevent him from assuring Herr Hitler that the British Government "had meant no harm." Mr. Chamberlain's account of the crisis of May 21st again put forward the German at the expense of the Czech point of view. The impression made on Parliament by his statement was that "the stories of German troop movements were completely unfounded." Deliberately or unconsciously Mr. Chamberlain had left an impression which was in flagrant contradiction to exact and detailed information about German troop movements which was in the hands of the British Government and on the basis of which Great Britain had acted the previous week-end. To give this impression was to put upon the Czechs the entire blame for the crisis of May 21st. It was almost to give credence in this country to the Nazi story that the whole crisis had been engineered by the Czechs against Germany and the Sudeten Germans.

One of the reasons given by members of the British Government for their failure to give support to the Czechs is that they could not carry with them the public opinion of this country. In the light of constant misrepresentations of the facts of the situation, and the confusion and ambiguity of British foreign policy, it is hardly surprising that British public opinion has scarcely yet grasped the vital importance of the issues at stake. In the first week of September, however, British public opinion was stiffening and the people of this country seemed ready to make a stand once and for all against the brutality and intemperance of the Nazis. It was this moment which the British Government, it was reliably reported, chose to put renewed and terrific pressure on the Czechs to capitulate to the

Carlsbad demands, which they themselves had admitted a few months earlier to be unacceptable. If the British Government had all along had the intention to further Nazi aims in Eastern Europe, it could hardly have reached a conclusion more satisfactory to the Nazis. Within six months of their victory of May 21st the democratic powers appeared to have surrendered their position with their principles. Even this did not satisfy the Nazis and on September 12th, the day of Hitler's main speech at the Nuremberg Congress, a declaration of war was hourly expected.

## CHAPTER XV

### WILL THE CZECHS FIGHT FOR GREAT BRITAIN?

AN explanation often advanced for the ambiguity of British foreign policy is the backwardness of British rearmament. Policy, it is said, must not go beyond armed strength. In that case the British Government would have to decide whether the collapse of Czechoslovakia, the creation of a German Middle Europe and the deposition of France from the rank of a first-class Power are changes which would fortify rather than weaken Britain's strength and Germany's respect for her. If they would not do so, the danger to Great Britain of a Nazi Germany, to whom so much strength has been added, would be considerably greater than that which already threatens. Therefore the British Government must calculate whether the time gained by sacrificing Czechoslovakia to the Nazis would compensate Britain for the loss of her Czechoslovak ally.

In a few months, or even years, could Great Britain produce from her own resources a Conscript Army of over 1½ millions, more than a thousand aeroplanes and an increase in industrial capacity more than three times that of Italy?

This is the estimate of the Czechoslovak armed strength given by a colonel in the Czechoslovak General Staff, Colonel "Yesten." He is for obvious reasons quoting from German sources.

"According to the German specialists, our peace time army numbers 180,000 men. On mobilisation 1,500,000 well-trained soldiers could be called to the



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colours. According to the same sources, our land army is divided into 7 corps which, altogether, include 15 infantry divisions, two mountain brigades, four cavalry brigades, one tank brigade, one brigade of heavy artillery, one heavy air brigade with two regiments and, in addition, five independent air regiments. Since our air army is principally designed for defensive purposes, the air army is a part of the land forces, as in the United States, and not an independent air force. The Germans assert that the mountain and cavalry brigades can be counted as divisions. Hence, the peace time army of Czechoslovakia represents 22 divisions which would be approximately doubled by mobilisation.

"The majority of German military experts agree that Czechoslovakia could put 40 well-armed divisions into the field.

"Czechoslovakia has inherited 75 per cent of the heavy industry of the old Austria-Hungary. In the World War, Austria-Hungary provided, from its own industries, an army of about 90 divisions. Czechoslovakia can support not only 40 divisions from its own industry but also at least 30 divisions of its allies.

"Assuming that the enemy is able to damage or seize a part of our industry, there will, nevertheless, remain a very large economic and productive basis, especially since in the last few years the most important branches of industry have been moved from the dangerous frontier areas far into the hinterland!" (and, it may be noted, underground).

Great Britain would have not only to replace this lost strength, but to reckon with these forces being used against her. The British Government bought the Bren Gun from the Czechoslovak Skoda works in 1935. It is not the only armament with which the Czechs have furnished us. If Czechoslovakia falls into the hands of the Nazis, our patents would be in the hands of the German Army. The real question is not whether we are going to fight for Czechoslovakia, but whether the Czechs are going to fight for us. Nor is it

that alone. The Skoda works would be bought out by the Nazis just as, after the war, they were bought by the Czechs and French from the Austrians and Germans. The partnership of "puppet-Czech" and Nazi would not be on the side of this country.

Military resistance to Nazi Germany concentrates in the Sudeten German mountains. Political resistance concentrates in the Prague Government. If military resistance is overcome by the concession of territorial autonomy to the Sudeten Germans, or political resistance by the installation in Prague of a puppet Czech Government which would accept the Nazi demands, effective resistance to the Nazis in Eastern Europe collapses. Agreement at the present time means a Nazi victory.

On the other hand the stand which the Czechoslovak Government made on May 21st was a democratic victory. It rallied opinion all over the world opposed to Nazi aggression. Notably Colonel Beck, the pro-Nazi foreign Minister of Poland and M. Stoyadinovitch, the Premier of Yugoslavia, have both made declarations for the first time in support of Czechoslovakia. There is not a country in Eastern Europe which would welcome a Nazi advance. Even in Hungary, the chief impulse towards a pro-German policy is fear and not enthusiasm. The strongest weapon in Germany's hands is defeatism. The Nazis are working night and day in every corner of Europe, and above all in Eastern and Southern Europe, "to make plain to the enemy the hopelessness of resistance" (Colonel Conrad, Chief of Staff of the German 18th Army Corps). If the Prague Government capitulates, the "hopelessness of resistance" will bear down on every East European Government. If war breaks out between Germany and the Western Powers after the Czechs have been forced to surrender, the whole of Eastern Europe will provide a barrier of "neutral" territory protecting Germany's Eastern flank.

This means that Russia will cease to count as an active

ally of France. It means that Great Britain will have the whole burden of French defence on its shoulders. It means that the aeroplanes which might have been shot down by the Czech anti-aircraft guns, the best in Europe, will be used to devastate London and Paris.

To-day the assistance which Russia could render as the ally of France and of Czechoslovakia is underrated by the British Government. Dislike of the Soviet system plays a large part in judgments on its efficiency. The actual extent of the assistance which Russia could effectively transport to the Czechoslovakia front is, of course, unknown. The Russian air forces, however—even the isolated machines sent to Spain—have shown themselves superior to the Germans. Moreover Russia's Air Force is far larger. As the crow flies it is less than 100 miles from the Western frontier of Russia to the Eastern frontier of Czechoslovakia. Aeroplanes flying sufficiently high can cross any neutral territory without being detected from the ground. If Poland wished to remain neutral in a way between Germany and Russia she would not trouble to send up fighters to 20,000 feet to enquire whether Russian bombers were hiding in the clouds. Rumania would not hinder the transport either of Russian war material or the flight of Russian aeroplanes.

In 1917 a Russia, defeated after three years fighting, torn by civil war, in complete disorder and chaos, a Russia which had signed under duress the treaty of Brest Litovsk, was sufficient to hold up in the East a German army of occupation over a million strong. It would appear, therefore, if only for this reason, that the Czech and Russian alliances were of vital importance to Western Europe to-day. The same Nazi propaganda which affirms that these two powers would be useless as allies for France has exerted itself to the utmost to win to the Nazi side these two "useless" Powers.

Czechoslovakia, as Nazi Germany realises only too well, is a serious danger to Germany if the Nazis provoke a European war. Though the extent of their

common frontier, and the possibility it gives Germany of surrounding the Czechs on three sides before war breaks out, sets a time-limit on Czechoslovak resistance. It also gives her two advantages. One is that she would be fighting on the inner line and her troops would be more mobile than those of Germany until Germany had succeeded in dislocating Czech communications. The other is that—jutting out as she does into the very heart of Germany and in easy bomber range of Germany's eastern bases—she is a formidable offensive air base. According to German sources, the Czechs have 1,400 aeroplanes; according to Russian, the Czechs can count on the addition of 3,000 Russian aeroplanes within a few hours of the outbreak of war.

Not only from the air but with long-range guns Czechoslovakia would do a certain amount of damage to the border towns of Eastern Germany before she herself was destroyed. According to the Czech military source quoted above, "The German press writes that our field-gun M-18 (calibre 83mm) has a range of 20 km; the 10-cm howitzer M-14/19, a range of 11 km; the 15-cm howitzer M-25, 12 km; the mountain howitzer, 11 km; the 15 cm field-gun, 20 km; the 24-cm field-gun, 30 km; and the 30.5 Morser, 12 km. The Germans assert that we have 9,000 light and 3,500 heavy machine-guns and approximately 400 tanks, made and produced in our own works."

In the event of war, it is obvious that on two fronts Germany would have to use a considerable proportion of her men and materials against Czechoslovakia. If Nazi Germany could avoid this necessity by previous political action, the German General Staff could turn all its attention to the West. The towns of France and England would suffer in proportion as the towns of Eastern Europe were spared. The *Schlieffen* plan of 1914 could be realised and the whole offensive of the German Army thrown against the West.

If Germany attacked Great Britain and France, time would be on the democracies' side. Great Britain and France together are weaker than Germany in purely military terms. But in terms of material resources, industrial capacity, colonial man-power and the morale of the people, they are far stronger. If Germany must fight on two fronts, resistance to her in Eastern Europe could take the form at least of a passive blockade designed to deprive her of essential foodstuffs and raw materials.

All Germany's efforts must accordingly be concentrated on a Blitzkrieg—lightning war. If the Nazis can undermine Eastern Europe, hollow out Czechoslovak resistance from within by means of the Sudeten German Nazis, this necessity would be removed. Germany would have access to resources which would enable her to hold out as long as Great Britain and France. In the present situation, if a Blitzangriff (lightning attack) fails, Nazi Germany would be very unlikely to win. Nazidom thrives only on victory. A series of defeats means in the end revolution in Germany. Thousands of Germans inside and outside the German frontiers are working for this now. War would be their opportunity. Hitler would have to arm thousands of the internal enemies of his régime. Guns would eventually be turned against him. Therefore he must win the war immediately or never. Can he do it?

A short time ago a prize was offered by the German Military Academy for the best essay on an attack on Czechoslovakia. It was won by Colonel Conrad, mentioned above.

"Germany cannot carry out a long war, he writes, and the dearth of material demands the quickest possible ending of a campaign. . . . Attack on Czechoslovakia cannot be spoken of as a campaign in the ordinary sense. The outstanding feature is that the whole action must be concluded within 14 days at the most, and if possible in a shorter time. The world must be confronted with an accomplished fact

at lightning speed; the troops which carry out the operation must be ready in the shortest time for eventual use in the West, in case France decided to help its ally and sought to contest the decision already successfully achieved.

“If France takes action automatically and with her full forces, a dangerous ‘long war’ could arise.”

The plan Colonel Conrad advocated bears a remarkable similarity to the present situation.

“We find ourselves in the situation in which troops which are to operate against Czechoslovakia *do not require to be mobilised*, for a large part of these troops by continuous changing remain in mobile condition. Moreover the action against Austria shows that we can mobilise unobserved.

“It is to be expected that the action against Czechoslovakia *will take place in connection with occurrences in the Sudeten German territory*. It is not the business of the army to be concerned with the how and why. Consequently the entry into the Sudeten German territory must follow on a wide front. For this task the third and Fourth Army divisions are envisaged, which must ruthlessly attack with tanks, after the strong, illegal S.A. and S.S. troops had infiltrated into the area. Together with Sudeten German organisations they have the task of blowing up and destroying the enemy movement. As the entry is an act of liberation and so would presumably follow *without a declaration of war*, little time will be left to Prague for the organisation of resistance.

“In proportion as the war zone is reduced by the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, the troops thus liberated *should be transported to the west*. Before the French mobilisation is completed, the operation against Czechoslovakia must be substantially over, so that the risk which France is undertaking, shall be felt in its full weight.

“In the Sudeten area, troops should be raised from those Germans who have been trained in the

Czechoslovak Army. To this end, the creation of a General Command in Reichenberg should be at once undertaken.

"There should, after 14 days at most, be no Czech Army left."

Colonel Conrad's account betrays a happy optimism. The days of the Blitzangriff have passed. This was seen last May when the Czechs forestalled the Germans by 24 hours, and accomplished a Blitzverteidigung (defence) which ruled out Colonel Conrad's conditions for success—that it should be unexpected and concluded within 14 days.

The Czechs have three lines of defences between the German frontier and Prague. They have small machine-gun nests right on the frontier, tank traps and barrages. Further in the interior they have a line of small fortresses. The third and strongest line is nearer Prague. Between the first and second lines lie wooded hills, and the formation of the country itself can be used for delaying actions on the parts of the Czechs. The first two lines of fortifications are designed entirely to hold off the German advance until foreign assistance—in the first place Russian aeroplanes but probably also numerous volunteers from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria—can give the Czechs equality if not supremacy in the air. Between the second and third lines lies a flat plain to the north and east of Prague. It is essential that the Czech retreat across this plain should be protected by their own and allied aircraft. By the time the Czechs assemble on the third and strongest line of fortifications, the Germans will be faced with the necessity of crossing this plain under the fire of the Czech artillery and the Russian bombers.

It is impossible to foretell how long the Czechs can hold back the immensely superior forces of the Germans. Sooner or later the Czech line is bound to break. It may be a matter of days, weeks, or months. Everything depends on what forces the Germans put into

action against Czechoslovakia; whether the Western Powers deflect the German Army in the west; how strong the German Maginot line may be and how many men are needed to man it. It depends also on political conditions; whether Italy supports Germany (which appears increasingly unlikely); what happens in Hungary; what the Yugoslavs are expected to do; where the Polish Government stands. The Czechs themselves realise that they could not hold out indefinitely. Germany, writes the Czech military authority quoted above,

"is many times stronger than Czechoslovakia and, furthermore, encloses half of Czechoslovakia as though with mighty jaws. It goes without saying, therefore, that the Czechoslovak General Staff and Government are exerting themselves to create the best possible military, political and economic conditions for a *temporary* struggle against superior force.

"This superior force will, at the beginning, have to be met by the Czech forces both on land and in the air. The Czech Air Force and air defence forces must expect a number of difficult days until the air assistance of our French and Russian allies arrives and gives us superiority in the air for the continuation of the struggle. The land forces, as a matter of fact, will have to stick it out some weeks longer before the allied armies push forward into German territory and force the German High Command to turn its main forces against them. The decisive battle which will begin on the Rhine in the third or fourth week of the war will transform the Czechoslovak battle area into a second-rate area.

"Czechoslovakia must therefore reckon with the following facts. (a) 2 or 3 days of resistance against superior forces in the air and land. (b) 2 or 3 weeks of resistance against superior force on land.

"There will of course be no declaration of war. The enemy will attempt, through a sudden attack by vast army units and air squadrons, to break through our frontier defences and to render our mobilisation and concentration of troops impossible."

The last paragraph is already out of date. Germany and Czechoslovakia are both mobilised. On May 20th, a Blitzangriff might still have been successful. On May 21st it was already too late. Czechoslovakia is prepared and the whole active male population has been trained in the army. In the event of war the whole civil population, men and women from the ages of 17 to 60, will be conscripted, and each knows already the work which they will be called upon to do. By virtue of a far-reaching law the Government can take over all industries important for national defence. Czechoslovakia is self-supporting in grain, meat and sugar. The Czechs are prepared even if Great Britain is not. They must hold the pass till the country behind has been fortified. It is not a question of Great Britain fighting for Czechoslovakia but of the Czechs gaining the time to defend her non-combatants, to train her soldiers, which would be urgently needed by Great Britain if war broke out.

In the end, the main Czechoslovak defence must be broken but those brief weeks would have served their purpose. And even when their main lines are broken, Czech resistance would not be at an end. It is this danger which the German Nazis are trying to forestall.

"One must reckon (writes Colonel Conrad), with an enormous concentration of force, for otherwise the Czech national character might come to think—as in Spain—that nests of resistance in stubborn despair should be formed. It has been shown that once the first horror has been overcome, that well-armed troops can for a long time successfully resist a superior foe. In the course of such a struggle, even inferior troops—for instance the Spanish Militia—can gain in morale."

In given circumstances, suggests Colonel Conrad, the Czechs will behave like the Spaniards. The circumstances, he admits, will have been made by Nazi

Germany, just as the circumstances of the Spanish War were made by Mussolini's Italy. Italy and Germany have each seized hold of an internal discontent to make a war for international purposes. Each is after strategic bases. Each is moving into position. "Europe is confronted," as Mr. Churchill said after the annexation of Austria, "with a programme of aggression, nicely calculated and timed, unfolding stage by stage," and there is only one choice open, not only to us but to other countries—either to submit as Austria has submitted, or to take effective measures while time remains to ward off the danger.

This is the real question at issue in Czechoslovakia. The grievances of the Sudeten Germans would not be the real cause of war. They themselves are largely the product of the Nazi régime in Germany which glorifies war and does not shrink from using it to achieve its ends. No Home Rule for the Sudeten Germans would put an end to the programme of aggression. The Nazi leaders themselves openly boast of this. No "plebiscite", organised under terror and the threat of war, would remove from Europe the menace of Nazi aggression. It would but postpone the war it was designed to avoid, and the war when it came would be one which we would fight, having sacrificed our friends and our principles, lost all allies in Eastern Europe and faced with overwhelming numbers. "The risks become smaller the more powerful we become," said Goebbels in April, 1938. Sooner or later, therefore, a stand has got to be made. Germany, on the Nazis' own showing, is in ferment and the explosion is at hand. If the Powers present a united defence against the plan of aggression expounded by Colonel Conrad, this explosion will come within the frontiers of Germany and the German people will have their chance to rid themselves of their present rulers. If the Powers are weak or divided, if they patch up a spurious "agreement" with the Nazis which sacrifices Czechoslovak

independence, these rulers will retain power and the explosion will not be confined within the German frontier. Who really believes that after five years of Nazi rule, there are other practicable alternatives than revolution or war?

"Revolutions will be superfluous as soon as we abolish the oppression of one nation by another, of one class by another and the dominion by force of some over the souls of others," said Masaryk.

That is the guiding spirit and solid strength of Czechoslovak democracy. The Czechs are determined to maintain freedom and justice within their own State and to resist tyranny and the threat of violence from without. They have created a free nation by their own exertions in the past. By their own example in the present, they may yet save Europe.



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